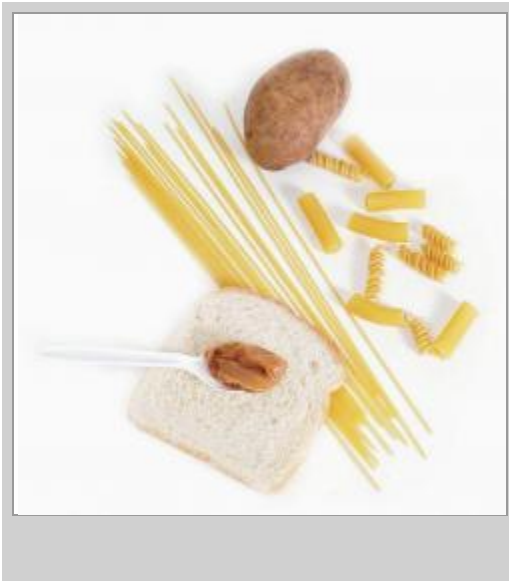


## Is your Child on the BEIGE DIET?

By Kate Scarlata, RD, LDN    Robea Patrowicz Photography



Are chicken nuggets and French fries at the top of your child's favorite food list? It seems for countless children that their preferred foods have one prominent feature; that is, they are all beige in color. "Beige eaters" frequently enjoy foods such as: white bread, peanut butter, chicken, potatoes and pasta. Do your children follow this beige pattern?

### **Beige Diet Dangers**

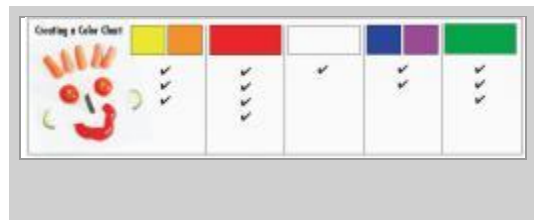
Eating a primarily beige palate of foods simply does not provide all the vital nutrients the body needs, particularly that of a growing child.

Beige foods lack the vibrant colors that make up a wholesome and nourishing diet. It's true; some of the "beige foods" are nutritious choices. A potato, for instance, is jam packed with Vitamin C and potassium, two valuable nutrients for good health, but a colorful diet provides so much more; namely, far more vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are key plant compounds, which play an essential role in disease prevention.

With diet-related illness on the rise in children, it is of prime importance to encourage our kids to indulge in more produce. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO), a group committed to assessing world health trends, rates poor intake of fruit and vegetables as one of the top ten risk factors contributing to death. They report that up to 2.7 million lives could be saved annually with sufficient fruit and vegetable consumption.

### **Play with Color**

To implement a colorful diet at home, start by encouraging your family to share a list of any fruits and/or vegetables that they enjoy or are willing to try. A great Web site to check out is [fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov).



Elisa Zied, MS, RD, author of *Feed Your Family Right*, reveals that many kids need to try some foods multiple times before they begin to enjoy eating them. "Kids may need 8 to 20 exposures to a food before they eat it and actually enjoy it," she adds, "the earlier they're offered the food, and the more frequently they're offered the food--without being forced or coerced--the more likely they are to accept it."



To be successful in your mission to improve your family's health, be sure to involve the family in meal planning, provide a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal, and encourage everyone to at least try a bit of everything that is served at the meal. Coercing children or bribing them does not encourage a positive relationship with food and will likely backfire.

Start with the following suggestions, and you will find adding color to your diet can be simple.

### **Quick Tips to Colorize Your Breakfast**

- Add fresh or dried fruit to your favorite cereal or on your favorite yogurt.
- Try whole grain toast topped with peanut butter and banana slices.
- Include a scoop of canned pumpkin or mashed banana to your favorite pancake mix.
- Make homemade carrot muffins or banana bread as another delicious breakfast alternative.

When it comes to this important morning meal, Ward suggests that parents serve one serving of 100% fruit juice, such as, "a glass at breakfast to be sure your child starts the day with at least one serving of fruit under his/her belt. Fortified OJ has as much calcium and Vitamin D as milk."

### **Making Lunch and Dinner Vibrant and Nourishing**

- Add a serving of baby carrots, sliced red peppers, grape tomatoes or sliced cucumber to your brown bag lunch. Serve a dip on the side.
- Make baked French fries with sweet potatoes and/or red skinned potatoes cut potatoes into slices, drizzle with olive oil, and add a dash of sea salt and pepper-Bake at 375 until golden brown.
- Add finely grated carrots to your favorite spaghetti sauce. This adds a heaping dose of Vitamin A and a sweet taste that most children are certain to love.

## **Snacks**

- Add toothpicks (if age appropriate) to a plate of cut-up fruit or canned fruit in its own juice. Kids will find eating more pleasurable and more likely to partake in the produce.
- Fun packaging appeals to kids; try to purchase colorful re-useable containers to put the veggies and dip into for snack time.
- Trail mix or 100% fruit roll ups are a great way to add dried fruit to your child's diet-remember to encourage teeth brushing after they eat this sticky fruit.

## **Somewhere Over the Rainbow**

Three fun activities that help add color and enhance family's diet and health include: creating a color chart, making a fruit and yogurt parfait, and starting your personal "Fruit of the Week Club."

### **Creating a Color Chart**

A color chart can be a great tool to use with children to evaluate and encourage a variety of fruits and vegetables in their diet. To create a color chart, write the following five categories of color groups on a piece of paper: yellow/orange; red; white; blue/purple, and green. Have each member in the family keep track of the fruits and vegetables that they consume in each color category by putting a check mark or stickers under the color header on their chart. For example, eating an orange earns a check under the yellow/ orange category and raisins or blueberries would earn a check under the blue/purple category. Don't emphasize portion size rather focus on adding variety and color. The goal is that by week's end, each individual has seven checks under every color category.

### **Make a Yogurt Parfait**

Simply layer vanilla yogurt alternatively with chopped strawberries and frozen blueberries. Top with granola and dig in. Try Greek style yogurt as a different alternative to traditional yogurt. Kids and adults enjoy its creamy texture.

### **Fruit of the Week Club**

Encourage your children to join you on a trip to the grocery store's produce section. Have each child select one fruit he has never seen or eaten before. Learn where the fruit originated and where it is grown. Children connect more with food when they learn more about its origin.

Enjoy adding a variety of produce to your diet. You and your children will reap the healthful rewards.

Kate Scarlata is a Registered Dietitian and a mom of three children living in Medway. Kate coauthored the book, *Real People Need Real Food: A Guide to Healthy Eating for Families Living in a Fast Food World*, iUniverse 2008.

***Editor's Note: Try this trick for serving kids vegetables: serve them frozen. Yup. Not cooked. Like ice. You won't believe how much some kids like to eat frozen peas or green beans. The novelty gets them interested.***

Another tip is to buy baby food even if you no longer have babies. Banana plum grape is the best! We mix it in pancake and muffin batter. You can put it in a pretty dish and the kids can eat it plain (just like pudding except it's all fruit!)

I bet you have lots of great ideas about adding more color. Send them to us: [editor@baystateparent.com](mailto:editor@baystateparent.com). Let us know how the color chart works in your home. We are definitely going to try it in ours.

- Carrie Wattu