

## The Big Chill with Melissa d'Arabian

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*Got a picky eater? Use a cold snap to launch a new game plan.*

Last year, my family and I went skiing at a resort I had frequented in my single days. As the vacation neared, I raved repeatedly to my husband about how the mountain lodge served the best chili ever. So after a two-day odyssey in our minivan (note to self: sometimes a plane ticket is money well spent), we arrived. As is typical of (my) life with kids, by the time we got

our girls dressed, bundled, booted, and off into the safe hands of their ski instructor, it was already 11 a.m. I suggested to my husband that we go for our chili lunch first, before we started skiing. And that was my big mistake.

The huge vat was waiting for us in the lodge, and I watched with excitement as the stew was poured into two giant bowls from a ladle the size of a small donkey. We paid the cashier and dug in. The first taste was familiar, reassuring. But then it dawned on me that it tasted a little dull (was chili powder the only spice in there?), even a bit ... tinny. The look on my husband's face went from anticipation to confusion: The chili was barely passable. How had I loved it for so many years? And that's when I learned a very important lesson: Food tastes better when you're cold, tired, and hungry.

Like any mom in my situation, I thought about how I could use the ski-lodge chili incident to my advantage (because that was 12 bucks I'd never see again). I have four daughters, and two are picky eaters. Pickiness is complex, rooted in a variety of physiological, psychological, and social issues. But there's one simple step you can take: Make sure your kids are hungry—and remember that cold weather builds appetites. Here are four of my favorite strategies.

### **1. Get outside!**

Even if it's cold, do something outdoors with your kids every day. Even a quick session of shoveling snow (or playing in it) can make you hungry.

### **2. Implement the Fresh 15.**

I've noticed that if my girls watch TV or work on computers immediately before dinner, they are pickier. So I started the Fresh 15: During the 15 minutes right before dinner, my daughters must be occupied with something active, preferably outside, whether it's riding bikes or playing fetch with our dog, Roxy. TV after dinner is okay—but before dinner, it's the Fresh 15.

### **3. Use your family's favorite winter comfort foods to introduce new flavors.**

If the gang loves meatballs, modify your normal recipe from an Italian profile (basil, Parmesan cheese, garlic) to North African (cumin, turmeric). If your kids love your stuffed chicken breasts with ham and cheese, try cheese, garlic, and a few leaves of spinach.

### **4. Get everyone to fall in love with soup.**

Soup is a fantastic way to bring nutrients to the table and use up ingredients in your fridge. (Budget bonus!) Start by focusing on recipes you think the kids will love (like a creamy baked potato soup or broccoli-cheese soup) and switch to a healthier version later.

Will our kids be dancing a jig when we feed them broccoli because they've just built a snowman? Probably not. But managing picky eaters is about progress, not perfection, so even the small victories are worth celebrating.

*Get more of Melissa's picky-eater strategies and kid-friendly recipes in her new Food Network Web series, [The Picky Eaters Project](#).*