

Taste of Cabbage Brings Tears of Joy to This Dad

By Steve Baldwin, MS, RD, Associate Editor

“What is *that*?” my 7-year-old daughter Sarah asked earlier last week at the grocery store. “It looks funny.”

“Want to try some?” I asked, while thinking purple cabbage might be too bitter for her taste. “Sure,” she said.

“Really, you want to try some?” I asked. “Yes,” she replied enthusiastically. “Yes!” Only the second time it came out “Yeeeeehhhhs!” This is the same kid that has been known to beg for asparagus and thinks corn on the cob is, and I quote, “Yummy yummy YUMMY!”

Admittedly, I sometimes get overly excited about the most mundane things. When our kids eat their vegetables, my insides jump up and down with glee. A few weeks ago at dinner, our children ate their broccoli without being asked. I felt like I had won the lottery. I nonchalantly said, “Good job kids,” while thinking, “Look, LOOK, they’re eating broccoli, BROCCOLI!”

Of course, Sarah is also the same kid who raids the kitchen candy jar (which is ironically shaped like an apple), has donuts every Saturday morning (a family tradition), and recently said she would select double chocolate chip cookies as the only “food” she would want to eat if stranded on a desert island. “Why double chocolate chip cookies?” I asked. “Because...they have chocolate in them,” she replied incredulously, as if it was the dumbest question asked in the history of print media interviews.

Anyhow, back to the cabbage. I waved down the employee working in the produce section and asked him if we could try a leaf. “Of course,” he replied while cutting off and handing a chunk to each of us. “Umm, it’s good,” Sarah says, swallowing it down. “Can we buy some Dad?”

Even now, I get chills down my spine just thinking about it. It’s hard, typing this column while fighting back tears of joy. I might print up T-shirts: *My kid likes cabbage!* I have no idea if she really likes cabbage, or if she just likes to humor her dietitian father. Maybe it’s a little of both. Frankly, I’m not crazy about cabbage myself. But who am I to tell her what tastes good?

There are some universal truths that parents can lean towards when deciding how to feed their children. First, we parents should eat what we want our kids to eat. If you want your child to eat more vegetables, try eating more of them yourself – and make sure your child notices. Want them to drink less soda? Then you need to steer clear of the sweet stuff. Many kids – especially between the ages of two and four – want to eat the same foods you’re eating. That goes for carrots, candy, and most things in between.

Second, we should offer meals and snacks on a regular schedule, then let the child decide how much they should eat – or whether they are hungry at all. Forcing a child to clean his or her plate can send a confusing message to kids: “You don’t know when you’re hungry or full.” Allow kids to get hungry between meals and snacks, and then allow their internal feelings of hunger or fullness guide their eating. It’s an important step to as they develop into healthy eaters. It keeps them on the road to becoming an adult who can appreciate the joys of eating all foods in a way that honors their health.

Lastly, plan for the occasional treat. It’s an old message, but it holds true: when enjoyed in moderation, all foods can fit into a healthy diet. The occasional cookie or weekend “donut day” doesn’t make you a bad parent. In fact, I will argue just the opposite. Take the focus away from the food, make it about tradition and family, and you’ll be setting your family up for long-term dietary success.

In the end, Sarah and I bought a head of cabbage, brought it home, and cooked it up. She may never eat it again; I can’t be sure. It’s up to her. But I wouldn’t bet against it. My daughter gets excited about the strangest things.

I couldn’t tell you where she gets it from.

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