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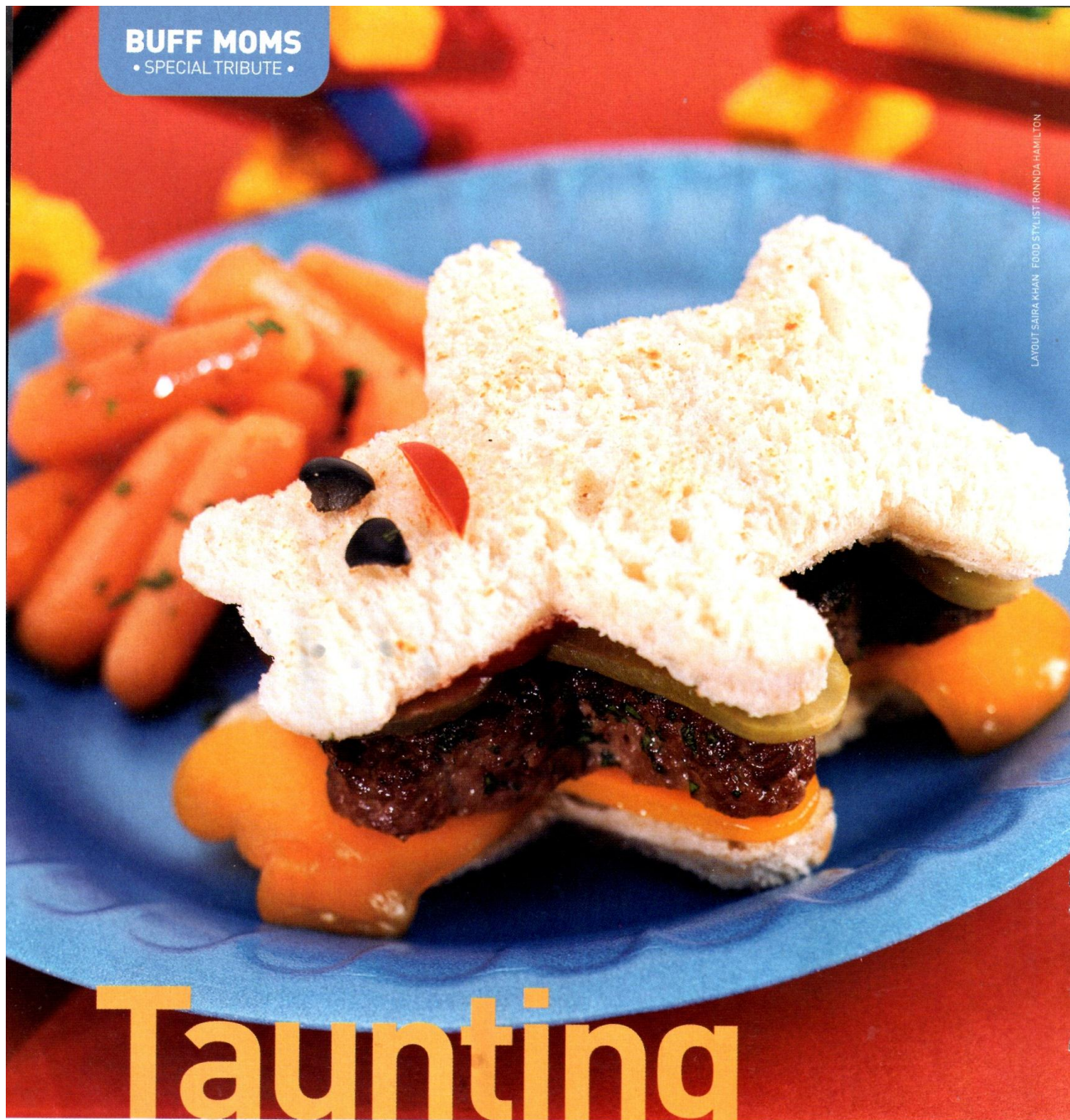
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Fitness Model
Brandy Flores
& Daughter
Kylie

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Taunting Leftovers

What do you do when your children don't finish their dinner? If you're licking their plates clean, it's time you stopped.

BY LISA HANNAM | PHOTOGRAPHY CORY SORENSEN

Looking back, I realize I was a difficult child at dinnertime. I hated squishy food. And I ate veggies, sure, but they had to be mashed evenly – no lumps – with a bit of margarine and pepper. But my mom and I never fought about it. She refused to force-feed me anything. Because of her own food experiences as a kid, she now refuses to eat carrots. So when I decided it was the end of dinner, my mom was conflicted. She didn't want to make me eat, but it was hard for her to throw away food. So she would pick at my leftovers and guiltily remind me that I was helping her gain weight. It was a parenting game to get me to finish my meal, but I remained just as stubborn as I was picky, and I never ate a bite I didn't want.

To this day, my mom still snacks on my leftovers when I'm over for dinner. (Although, there are fewer leftovers because I'm much more appreciative of a home-cooked meal.) "I don't do it as much as I used to," my Mom says. "But when I was growing up I wasn't allowed to leave the table until my plate was clean."

Study after study shows that how parents feed their children has a direct effect on how they will eat when they become adults. The American Academy

of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reports that between 16 and 33 percent of children are obese. It seems as though the "clean your plate" philosophy could be contributing to bigger kids and parents.

But how much influence do the leftovers your kids leave on their plates have on *your* diet? There aren't any studies that have analyzed the influence of children's eating behaviors on their parents' eating behaviors.

"You would think someone would have thought of this already," says Staci Freeworth, an Oregon, Ohio-based registered dietician, who has worked exclusively with moms, infants and toddlers. It's probably mothers who would be interested in such a study, but who are too busy to partake in it, suggests Freeworth. Do a Google search of the words "mothers leftover children's plates" and you'll find that many women do it, talk about it and worry about it. One mother posted this note on a parenting message board: "Tell me I'm not the only mother who eats leftover breakfast food off her children's plates after they've gone to school... Tell me why do I do this?" Another mother replied: "Because we'd rather 'waist' it than waste it."

"When kids are younger, [parents are] so focused on their children, they always put themselves second and forget to take the time and plan a meal for themselves," says Freeworth. So mealtime is mostly for the kids. If you cook too much or your children aren't as hungry as you thought, you may find yourself nibbling their food. Parents are more likely to eat when palatable foods are present, rather than because of physical hunger, reports *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. That's what Freeworth labels "mindless eating," when you're not really paying attention to what you're putting in your mouth and how it's going to affect your body. "Your body is an afterthought to your child, really," explains Freeworth. "It's a normal maternal instinct, but it doesn't really help your health a whole lot."

waste not, want not

Ask women why they feel uncomfortable throwing food away, and time and time again, you'll hear that it's not OK to waste food. But when a kid is in an eating jag – eating the same thing over and over – it can be frustrating for parents. In the end, they may end up eating two meals – their own and their kids' – especially if they don't like to waste food.

Other times, mothers could be eating extra because they're bored. The experts agree that it takes much longer for children to eat than adults. "You're just sitting there – idle time," says Freeworth. "Your eyes are very powerful. You see food; you want to eat it."

So your first step to getting off the leftover diet is to learn how much food kids need and to trust your children – they know when they're full. According to the National Network for Child Care, parents should respect children's ability to know their needs. If they want seconds or thirds, you can make more food.

"[Children] are not overweight to begin with," says Jyl Steinbeck, author of *The Busy Mom's Make It Quick Cookbook* (Meredith, 2003) and *Fill Up to Slim Down* (Penguin, 2005). "Unfortunately it's what we do in the family to make them that way. If adults were like kids, we'd all be thin."

It's obvious your children can't eat adult portions, but are you serving them adequately? A child's hand is an easy tool to use to figure out how much is enough. For example, fish, chicken or meat should fit in the palm of the child's hand. Veggie side dishes should be the size of his or her fist, and cheese, the size of his or her thumb.

Steinbeck, who is also a mother of two, says, "Serving sizes are very small and that's why it's okay to eat six times a day." She suggests that children eat breakfast, then a 10:00 a.m. snack, lunch, an after-school snack, dinner and a later snack. This way "they have more even-keeled energy levels, and you'll have less waste."

WHAT TO DO WITH LEFTOVERS

Study after study shows that parents' eating habits impact children's, so be a good role model and don't overeat. Here are some guilt-free ways to get rid of leftovers:

- Use the leftovers for a soup or for tomorrow's main dish.
- Keep it cool. Says Jyl Steinbeck, "Put it in the refrigerator in case your kids are hungry later."
- Toss the doggy bag. Steinbeck says eating out should be considered a treat that doesn't go home.
- Don't let food sit out. "Get it out of your line of sight and put it away," says Staci Freeworth. "That way you don't feel as if it's going to waste."



nutrition ■

**NUTRIENTS
PER SERVING:**
Calories: 246
Fat: 6 g
Carbs: 13 g
Fiber: 2 g
Protein: 23 g

adult vs. kid meals

You don't have the same eating habits as your best friend or your husband, so why would you eat same as your child? "We sometimes think children are just little adults," says Freeworth. "And they really need to be treated as children." Believe it, kids do have different nutritional needs.

Many adults eat out of habit, but kids need to eat out of necessity, and how much and how often they eat fluctuates. A one-year-old should consume about 1,000 calories a day, says the NNCC, while a three-year-old should get an additional 300 to 500 calories. Toddlers' diets should be higher in fat for brain and spinal cord development. And if your child literally runs circles around you, pound for pound, he or she will need more calories than you.

While your 40-30-30 diet works for you, it won't for your child. "Usually children need more carbohydrates than

they do protein," says Freeworth. They also shouldn't be limited from fats, like calcium-packed cheese. Thirty to 50 percent of their calories should come from fat, according to a newsletter from the *Child & Adult Care Food Program*, a lobby group that promotes children's nutrition issues. A child's need for protein slows down as his or her growth slows. And for adolescents, what they should eat depends on their gender, physical activity and growth. Freeworth says children have a tendency to be iron deficient, and recommends screening children of all ages.

With your own nutritional needs – low-calorie, low-fat foods – and your ever-changing children's needs, a smaller portion of what you're eating normally won't cut it. There are certain things you need to alter a little bit: make sure your children get their milk, are eating foods high in iron (which provides kids with energy), such as iron-enriched cereals and beans, and

are not drinking too much sugar in the forms of soda pop and fruit juice.

And don't worry if your child is a picky-eater; a study published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* reports your son or daughter will become less finicky as he or she ages.

stop picking

"It takes 21 days to make a habit and 30 days for a lifestyle change," says Steinbeck. And if you can't get out of the habit of picking off your kids' plates, then remember to feed them well, for your sake and theirs. "If [mothers are] eating leftover french fries, it's going to add quite a few more calories than if they just eat the rest of a piece of fruit," notes Freeworth, who prepares meals that are as good for her as they are for her children.

When you're not dining alone, with only a few additional ingredients and some creative changes to your recipes, you can make your kid a fantastic meal.



BURGUNDY-BALSAMIC CHOPPED STEAK

MAKES 1 SERVING

For you, a sophisticated lean steak to make your mouth water.

INGREDIENTS:

4 oz 96% lean ground beef
1 tbsp finely chopped flat leaf parsley
½ tsp garlic salt
Olive oil spray
½ small sweet white onion (approximately ½ cup),
cut into thin rings
1 tbsp sugar
½ cup burgundy wine (mom's burger only!)
1 tbsp balsamic vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix the beef with parsley until well combined, then form into a patty about ½ to ¾ inch thick. Season both sides with garlic salt. Place a small, nonstick frying pan over high heat until hot. Spray pan with olive oil then add steak patty. Cook for 2 to 4 minutes per side until the outside browns and the inside is slightly less done than desired. Place on a plate and cover to keep warm (it will continue to cook slightly while sitting). Reduce heat to medium, respray pan and add onions. Cook approximately 5 minutes until tender, but not browned. Mix in sugar, then add wine and return heat to high. Allow the mixture to boil until only about ¼ of the wine remains, then add vinegar and stir. Spoon onions then sauce over steak. Serve with brown rice and steamed veggies.

These recipes were created especially for Oxygen by chef and food expert Devin Alexander. For more suggestions, go to www.devinalexander.com.

**NUTRIENTS
PER SERVING.**
Calories: 295
Fat: 9 g
Carbs: 33 g
Fiber: 3 g
Protein: 25 g

TEDDY BURGER

MAKES 1 SERVING

For the kids, grab a cookie cutter and make dinner fun! It's super easy and promises no leftovers.

INGREDIENTS:

3 oz 96% lean ground beef	2 slices firm white bread
1 tbsp finely chopped parsley	2 black olives
Olive oil spray	1 sliver red pepper or tomato
1 tbsp sugar	1 pinch garlic salt
1 slice reduced-fat American cheese	Ketchup, pickles and onions, optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

Mix beef and parsley, then shape by pressing into a teddy bear-shaped cookie cutter, about the same height as the slice of bread. Remove from cutter, then press to flatten slightly (you want it slightly larger than the bread before it cooks, as it will shrink when cooking). Using same cutter, cut cheese into a bear shape and sprinkle with a pinch of garlic salt. When burger is almost finished, add cheese to melt. Remove and place on paper towel to drain. Next, cut bread into bear form. Cut triangles for eyes out of black olives, and a mouth out of red pepper or tomato. Put the burger bear on one slice of bread and top with ketchup, pickles or onions and finish with second bread slice. On top, place the eyes and the mouth. Serve with your child's favorite veggies.

MOM- & KID-FRIENDLY TABLE TIPS

- Have taste tests to broaden your children's food likes. Children have a natural tendency to reject unknown tastes, so make the unfamiliar familiar.

- Have your children pick – or if they're old enough, cook – a healthy recipe from a cookbook to give them a sense of control. One British study found that some kids refused food as a way to assert independence.

- Don't give up on foods your kids aren't crazy about. It may take six to 12 times before a kid will decide she or he likes it after all.

- Relax when you eat together. Mealtime could be 45 minutes or longer, as children eat slowly. After your children are finished eating, have them put their own dishes away so you're not tempted to continue eating.

NOTE