



Learning to like new flavours and foods

Most children are wary of new foods. Learning to eat a wide range of foods is like any other learning process – it takes time. Taste preferences change and develop throughout childhood.

Always offer foods in a calm and safe environment. Making a fuss can be counter-productive. When your child refuses a food it does not mean they will never eat it again. They just need time and encouragement to learn that 'tastebuds can change their mind'.

Here are some ideas to encourage your child to try a greater range of foods:

- > Be a role model. Children like to copy what you do. The more familiar they become with foods they see you eating, the more comfortable they will become with trying them.
- > Use other children as role models – offer new foods you know their friends like.
- > Offer all foods in a calm neutral way. Children love getting reactions and may refuse food to see what reaction they get. Staying calm and relaxed at mealtimes helps them to stay calm and relaxed and more willing to take on new challenges.
- > Encourage your child to explore new food. Even if they only touch, smell or lick the new food, this is an important first step. Discuss colour, texture, shape and smell of foods.
- > Involve your child in growing, shopping, preparing and cooking vegetables. Children can become familiar with vegetables without pressure to eat them.
- > Talk with your child about how their tastes can change and develop ('their tastebuds can change their minds').
- > Offer several healthy choices at snack times, and let your child decide which foods they are going to eat.
- > Serve new foods in a bowl or platter on the table for everyone to choose from.
- > Try finger food sticks and dipping sauce, cream cheese or peanut butter as a snack (providing your child is not allergic to nuts).
- > Make vegetables part of mixed dishes. Add to pasta sauce, lasagne, soup, stews, pizza, omelettes, quiche, patties or dips.
- > If they like mashed potato, mix in sweet potato, pumpkin, carrot or peas to make different colours.
- > Don't bribe your child to eat their vegetables, like offering dessert or sweets if they eat their vegetables. This links desserts and sweets with reward and makes them seem much more desirable.
- > Don't give up! Keep offering small serves of a variety of different vegetables and fruit. Your child may need 10 or more tries before they accept a new food.

For more information

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