

# Extending variety

## for children who have difficulty accepting new foods

This fact sheet provides you with information on how to gradually introduce new foods into your child's diet slowly in eight steps. Choosing the new food to introduce into your child's diet

- > Choose only one or two foods at a time to introduce into your child's diet.
- > Consider your child's preferences for taste and texture of foods – for example if your child likes crunchy foods, choose a crunchy food to introduce into the diet.
- > Consider foods and nutrients that are needed in your child's diet. Your dietitian or speech pathologist can help you decide what food to introduce.

### The 8 steps to eating

Follow these eight steps to introduce a new food into your child's diet.

This process takes time and it is important that your child is only moved onto the next stage of eating when they are very confident with the current stage.

It is important that your child feels no pressure to eat the food at any stage. At each stage it can be helpful to let your child know that they don't actually have to eat the food.

#### 1. Sight

- > Place a small amount of the food on your child's plate or on a side plate.
- > You may like to say "this food needs to stay on your plate – but you don't have to eat it" to make sure your child knows there is no pressure to eat the food.

#### 2. Touch

- > Ask your child to touch the food. Talk about what the food feels like.
- > Gradually work towards asking your child to pick up the food with their hands.
- > If touching the food is too distressing, ask your child to stab the food with a fork.

#### 3. Smell

- > Ask your child to tell you what the food smells like. Talk about what the food smells like.
- > You may like to say "I don't want you to eat it" to make sure your child knows they don't have to eat the food.

#### 4. Lick

- > Ask your child to lick the food. Talk about the taste of the food.
- > Gradually build up the number of licks.

#### 5. Taste

- > Ask your child to put the food in their mouth and take it out again quickly.
- > Work towards your child "hiding" the food in their mouth by closing their lips together.
- > Work towards your child keeping the food in their mouth as you count to three.

## 6. Bite

- > Ask your child to bite the food once and then take it out of their mouth.
- > Work towards increasing the number of bites.

## 7. Chew

- > Ask your child to put a small piece of the food between their back teeth and chew it.
- > Start with one chew and slowly increase the number of chews required before allowing them to take the food out of their mouth.

## 8. Swallow

- > Ask your child to swallow the food or “make the food disappear”.
- > It may help to wash the food down with water.

## Other tips to help your child accept a new food

- > **Encourage your child to be involved in handling the new food.** Examples:
  - Helping to put the groceries in the shopping trolley at the supermarket.
  - Helping to unpack the grocery bags at home.
  - Helping to plant and water a vegetable or herb garden.
  - Helping with preparing and cooking the food.
  - Helping to serve the food to the family.
- > **Eat with your child.** Children enjoy eating with their parents and siblings and will often try new things if they can see other people eating the new food.
- > **Be positive about food.** Set a good example and try not to share your dislike for a food. Allow your child to make up their own mind about a new food and encourage the whole family to politely express dislike for a food. E.g. “no thank you, I’ll try it another time”.
- > **Involve your child in family menu planning.** Welcome your child’s suggestions for new foods that they would like to try. Offer a couple of options and negotiate as a family.
- > **Mix things up.** Offer and prepare your child’s favorite foods in a variety of ways and combine them with new foods. Make a small, but noticeable, change to their favorite foods to ensure that they will still accept it. This will expose them to new flavors, textures, shapes, and brands of the foods that they usually accept.
- > **Allow your child to explore their preferences.** Ask your child “How can we make this food yummiier?” Come up with new ways to try the new food together.
- > **Be positive and encouraging.** Try not to label your child as being “picky” or “fussy” and instead praise your child for being “really good at trying new foods”.
- > **“What’s the green stuff?”** Always tell the truth about ingredients if your child asks. Teach them that they can trust the food that you have prepared them without having to hide ingredients.
- > **Remember to never pressure your child to eat a new food.**

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