



Child Development Service



Steps to eating a new food

Many parents tell us they just want their child to try a new food!

Your child may be more (or less) sensitive to the smell, sounds, sight, temperature, texture or taste of food, or to their surroundings at mealtimes.

This can make trying new foods very challenging.

Expecting your child to eat even a little piece of a new food the first time you put it on the plate may be too big a step for them.

Try letting your child explore each new food many times, and at their own pace, before they taste it.



Remember there are many small steps to exploring a new food, so every small step forward is a great achievement. These steps might include:

- Being in the same room as the food. Let your child simply see the food without asking them to touch, smell or taste it.
- Present the new food at the table, again without any pressure to try it. Your child might have a closer look at the food, even if it's on the other side of the table.
- Serve the food on a separate plate (maybe yours) and let your child see you eating it.
- Put the food on their plate. They might eventually touch the food with a fork, spoon, finger or another food.
- Ask your child pass the food to another person to eat.
- Let your child bring the food to their nose to smell it – if they don't want to touch it, they can lean down to smell the food.
- Your child might blow on the food, touch it with their lips or teeth, or even touch or taste it with the tip of their tongue.
- When your child is ready to put the new food into their mouth, they may spit it out without chewing it. They might do this a few times, or chew the new food and spit it out again before they're finally ready to chew and swallow.



Stress or pressure at mealtimes makes it hard to learn about a new food, and can decrease your child's appetite.



Positive experiences with food and mealtimes helps children to be more confident with new foods.

How much encouragement should you give?

Some parents tell us that their children like praise and encouragement as they progress with each step, while other children prefer to do it on their own when no one is looking. Even positive pressure (encouragement) can be too much!

Think about what is best for your child.



Things to remember

Start at a step that your child is comfortable and happy with.

Remember, learning about a new food will take time, and even little steps are good progress. Your child might be at a different step, and move at a different pace, with each new food they explore.

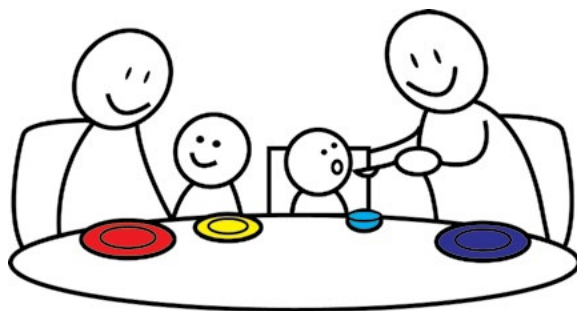
Start with new foods similar to the foods your child does eat. Think about the texture, temperature, smell, taste and colour of the food, and choose something similar.

Food play is another way of letting your child explore a new food, and gradually gain confidence to try it. Set up art and craft activities with foods, and allow your child to poke, prod, pour and play with a new food during playtime. They will learn how the food feels, smells and moves without the pressure to taste it.

Setting the scene for mealtimes

Parents and children have different roles at mealtimes.

Sticking to your role will help create calmer, more enjoyable mealtimes.



Parents

■ Choose and prepare the food.

While you can involve your child in choosing and preparing food, you are in charge of what food is served at each meal and for snacks. Children can become overwhelmed with the responsibility of choosing.

■ Be considerate with your meal choices. As well as serving new foods, **always have something on the table that your child will eat.** Let them choose which foods and how much they will eat. Remember they only have a small stomach!

■ Provide regular meal and snack times. It is important to have a gap between eating so that they can understand being hungry and feeling satisfied (full). This helps them to trust their appetite, and to know that if they decide not to eat a lot, or at all, they will have a chance to eat again soon.

■ Children learn from watching what is happening around them, even at mealtimes. **Eat with your child** if you can. They will learn from watching you and others eat different foods.

■ Trust your child's appetite. This means not trying to get them to eat more or less food, and not adding pressure. This is easier when you have a regular routine of meals and snacks so you know your child will be able to eat something they trusts every 2 or 3 hours. Remember that children need to be well, calm and alert in order for their appetite to be OK.

Children

■ Choose what to eat from what is offered

■ Choose how much to eat based on their own appetite

■ Learn about mealtime behaviours and foods by watching their parents and others eat.

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