



## Expanding kids' palates: Tips for encouraging new and healthy foods

Have you watched too many mouthfuls of vegetables be rejected to even think about putting anything green on your child's plate today? It happens. It is normal. Kids like what they are used to; they like what they have had time and time again.

What if you could offer your child nutritious foods they don't normally eat every day for a month? Would 30 days of having steamed broccoli change your child's mind about it? Research suggests that repeated exposure to new food could lead to the enjoyment of that food. While it may not be practical to serve broccoli for 30 days straight, you could serve it a few days each week. The more often you can offer new foods, the more familiar these foods become, and the more likely your child eats and enjoys these nutritious foods.

We develop a liking for certain foods based on how early we were given that food, how often we had that food available, how it was prepared, and even if our mothers ate that food while carrying us in the womb. If you did not eat platefuls of kale and carrots while pregnant, do not worry. Many factors affect what a child chooses to eat.

Here are seven tips to support your child in trying new foods

1. *Make the plate attractive.* Kids may be tempted to try a new food if it is served in a fun way. This could look like a steamed vegetable side of a few bright colors – such as red bell pepper, snap peas, and carrots. Steaming is a healthy cooking method that leaves vegetables bright in color which children like.
2. *Add a dip.* Pairing unfamiliar food with a dip or spread that the child likes could encourage them to give the new food another chance.
3. *Allow kids to help in the kitchen.* Allowing a child to peel fruit, wash the vegetable, or help plan a healthy meal can encourage trying that food. Involving children in the preparation process can create excitement and curiosity around the meal, which could lead to a more adventurous eater.
4. *Keep cues nonverbal.* Research suggests that allowing children to observe you enjoying a new food and to move at their own pace in trying foods is most effective in influencing what a child chooses to eat. It is important to praise children when they try new food and to remain neutral if they choose to ignore it.
5. *Pair new food with liked food.* Having three new foods at one meal could be overwhelming and end in a stressful mealtime with a child who refuses to eat any of the

foods offered. Introducing one new food during one mealtime increases a child's likelihood of trying and enjoying the new food.

6. *Continued offerings.* Regularly offering a certain new food, in different ways, gives a child more time to reach for the food and creates familiarity. When a child tries the food, dislikes the taste or texture, and spits it out, that is OK and is still progress! Trying new food, even for a moment, is worth praising.
7. *Keep new food offerings small.* A tiny portion of something new may be less daunting. Offering small amounts of new food could also decrease food waste while your child takes their time in trying that food.

Sometimes a child does not like food because they have not tried it enough to know or have not yet had the food prepared in a way that they like. However, sometimes a child simply does not like the food and that is OK. Do not worry if your child does not like a handful of foods, as there are many new and nutritious foods left to try.

## References

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (2020, April). Toddler and Preschooler Tasks in the Kitchen. Retrieved from <https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/cooking-tips-and-trends/toddler-and-preschooler-tasks-in-the-kitchen>

**Source:** Haley Adams, Dietetics and Human Nutrition student, and Courtney Luecking, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Health

Copyright © 2024 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.