

HOW TO: Encourage Your Child to Try and Taste New Healthy Food

Childhood is a critical period for the development of eating behaviors and habits that last into adulthood. These habits play a vital role in growth, development, overall health, and the prevention of obesity and other lifelong, diet-related chronic diseases.

It's not just WHAT we feed our kids that matters, but also HOW we handle feeding or eating that's really important in establishing lifelong healthy habits for our kids.

Healthy Eating Research's *Recommendations for Creating Healthy Eating Habits for Kids 2-8* is a set of evidence-based best practices for HOW to feed children.

The research shows that encouraging children to try new foods and helping kids learn to enjoy new foods is more effective than pressuring children to eat foods.



Hot tip!



The single most effective strategy to get kids to eat healthy food is **repeated exposure**. Kids may need to try something 10-15 times before knowing if they like it or not. This will require patience. It takes time—this can happen over weeks or months and through different preparations of the food.

Read more about the *Recommendations for Creating Healthy Eating Habits for Kids 2-8* at [HealthyEatingResearch.org](https://www.healthyeatingresearch.org). See tips in action on Instagram @HealthyEatingResearch or #HealthyTipsHealthyKids.

Some kids will need extra encouragement to try foods again and again. Below are tips to get kids involved and help inspire your children to try and taste new foods.

Encourage your little ones to learn through all of their senses! During playtime, allow kids to touch and smell their food to spark interest and improve comfort with new foods during meal prep or playtime.

Offer first courses. Offering vegetables as an appetizer at dinner gives kids the opportunity to eat healthy foods when hungry and without other competing food.

Pair a new food with familiar flavors. Sometimes offering new foods, like veggies, with well-liked dips or dressings or seasoning them in a familiar way will encourage kids to try new foods and may even help with acceptance.

Offer positive reinforcement, such as non-food rewards or praise to convey love and encourage trying new foods. Focus praise on willingness to try (“great job trying”) rather than the child (“you are a good boy”).

Let your children take charge (within healthy boundaries, of course) by choosing which vegetable they’d like to try. This choice should be given before meal preparation and based on what is available in the home, so food is not wasted.

Get creative! Give new foods fun names like “green brocco-trees”!

Model for children how delicious new foods can be. Children are quicker to try new foods and more accepting of them when observing others eating and enjoying the same foods and beverages.

More tips!

Ideas for Non-Food Rewards

Offering food as an emotional tool or reward can set kids up to use food as an emotional support later. Instead, try these non-food rewards:

- ▶ Offer verbal positive reinforcement for trying new healthy foods
- ▶ Give stickers
- ▶ Choose from a “prize box” of dollar store trinkets or party favors
- ▶ Play a favorite game

Tips to Limit Food Waste

- ▶ **Start small.** Even providing just a few small bites of a new food may be enough to get kids to like new foods while limiting wasted food.
- ▶ **Use frozen vegetables.** This reduces food spoilage and waste by allowing small amounts to be prepared and offered to kids at any given meal or snack.