

Picky Eater? Not Me!

Looking to add variety to your children's diets so they get all the nutrients they need? Tap into their sense of adventure and creativity to guide them toward trying new foods. They may find that eating more foods can be tasty—and fun!



Start small

Approaching your youngster with a small amount of a new food may work better than giving her a full serving. If she only sees a little on her plate, she's more likely to give it a taste. Let her see you eating the food that you want her to try—your example will mean the most to her. *Idea:* Many children are sensitive to new foods touching the rest of their meal. Try putting small pieces of the new item in a little bowl on your child's plate.

Make it familiar

Think about foods your youngster already enjoys. Then, look for some that are similar. For instance, if he likes green Granny Smith apples, bring home green Bartlett pears for him to try one day. If he loves cheeseburgers, experiment with turkey or veggie burgers. Or if he's a fast-food chicken nugget fan, make baked chicken nuggets (and even baked fish sticks) at home. *Idea:* Serve new foods with something your child already likes. Maybe you can add chopped, steamed broccoli to macaroni and cheese or put a tomato slice in his grilled cheese.



Let her choose

Your youngster is more apt to sample a new food if she picks it out. At the grocery store, have her decide on a new food each trip. She might select something interesting in the produce section, like avocado, eggplant, or pomegranate. Or ask her to choose a new variety of beans, such as cannellini or garbanzo. *Idea:* Let your child come up with a chart to mark her food explorations. For example, she could draw a picture of each new food item and then add a face for her reaction—maybe a half-smile or a full smile.



Try, try again

Did you know it can take 10–12 tries before your youngster decides he likes a new food? That's okay—the key is to get him to keep trying it. Consider preparing a food several different ways until you hit upon one he will eat. With carrots, for instance, try serving them raw; slicing and microwaving them until they're softer but still have a crunch; or cutting them into chunks, drizzling with olive oil, and roasting at 400° until tender. *Idea:* Ask your child to look through cookbooks and find a recipe or picture of a carrot dish that looks good to him. Then, make it together.

continued



Dip it!

Kids have more fun eating when they get to dip their food. Try sneaking in a few foods your youngster doesn't normally eat by pairing them with a dip. You might give her zucchini spears, sliced radishes, or snap peas along with low-fat ranch or Italian salad dressing. Or consider this: A small dipping bowl of ketchup can make an egg-avoider into an egg-eater. *Idea:* Use small cookie cutters to make dippable shapes out of melon, cheese, or other foods.

Go half and half

To help your child develop a taste for whole grains, think about ways to use them in foods that he already eats. You could make his favorite sandwich with one piece of white bread and another of whole wheat. Or put meatballs over a combination of whole-wheat and regular spaghetti (cooking times may vary). As your youngster gets used to whole grains, you can phase out the white products. *Idea:* Use whole-grain pita bread for a quick pizza snack or meal. Have your child top the pita with pizza sauce, toppings, and low-fat mozzarella cheese. Bake at 375° for 15 minutes.

Have a tasting party

Use the power of positive peer pressure to your advantage! Let your child invite several friends over for a tasting party. She can select foods to sample, some that she already eats and others that are new to her. *Examples:* almonds, bean sprouts, firm tofu, olives, and mandarin oranges. Then, she could help you make up sample trays. You might use muffin tins and place a different food in each cup. Or put the foods in separate muffin liners, and give each youngster a plate with a few tastes. *Idea:* Ask the kids to vote on their top three choices.

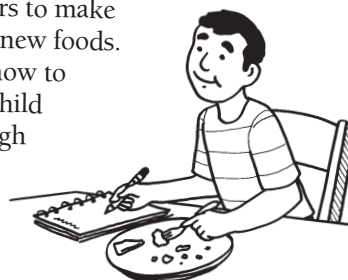


What's that flavor?

Make tasting food into a fun family discussion with this suggestion.

Explain to your youngster that there are five tastes—bitter, sour, sweet, salty, and umami (a rich, savory taste typical in soy sauce and mushrooms, for example). Then, as you sample different foods, discuss which category—or categories—they fit into. For instance, you might say, "This lemon chicken tastes tart with hints of sweetness." Encourage family members to make "tasting notes" as you try new foods.

Once he understands how to describe the tastes, your child might enjoy talking through the experience of trying foods. And that can lead him to sampling even more new foods!



Stick to it

Let your child use craft sticks or lollipop sticks to create fun-to-eat kebabs with healthy foods. You could set out fruit like blackberries, grapes, and melon chunks. Or give him cooked chicken cubes, pieces of cheese, and grape tomatoes. *Idea:* Suggest that he make a fruit or vegetable sculpture with his kebabs. Cut a cantaloupe in half, and scoop out most of the inside. Turn the half upside down so he can stick the fruit kebabs into the melon rind. Or he might put vegetable kebabs into a baked potato.

Reinvent sandwiches

Who says sandwiches have to be on bread? Use vegetables and fruits in its place. Put tuna fish salad (made with light mayonnaise) between cucumber slices. Try peanut butter between banana halves sliced lengthwise. Or have your youngster wrap turkey and cheese slices in a romaine lettuce leaf. *Idea:* Challenge her to come up with three new sandwich ideas using fruits and vegetables.

Drink new foods

Instead of eating new fruits and vegetables, what about drinking them? Your child might realize he likes mangoes, passion fruit, or even spinach when they're blended and put in a cup. *Idea:* In a blender, puree 1 cup fresh baby spinach with 1 cup no sugar added applesauce, 3 cups berries, and 1½ cups orange juice for a tasty treat.

Editor's Note: Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

Nutrition Nuggets™

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