

Encouraging Excellent Eating Early

Interested in giving your young child a taste for healthy eating right from the start? Kids can react strongly to the foods they are offered – healthy or not! They may push them away, refuse to open their mouth, shake their head, or more. What is a parent or caregiver to do?

With a few child-feeding tips and advice on how to set a positive tone for balanced, healthy eating, anyone can be a child-feeding pro!

EAT REAL FOOD!

Make every bite count with the new pyramid by offering a variety of nutritious options from each food group – fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein foods – including those that provide unsaturated fats and are low in added sugar and sodium, including those that prioritize protein, incorporate healthy fats and limit highly processed foods. From apples to avocados, corn tortillas to queso fresco, and pork to parsley, you can offer your child a variety of colors, textures, and flavors.

Once you know what to feed, it's time to master how to do it. Read on for our best tips to help young kids build healthy plates.



SETTING THE TABLE FOR SUCCESS

Mealtime is family time. Even ten minutes of eating together can increase children's fruit and vegetable intake. Start this habit with your baby or toddler by bringing them to the table with you

Your child may only be eating baby food but include them at meals to increase their exposure to table food by seeing the foods you eat.[^]

It can take up to 15 exposures before a food is "trusted" and tasted. Use the exposure time to describe the food.*

Tasting is just the first step – it can take 10 to 15 more exposures before they like the food. This means it could take 30 exposures in total before your child enjoys the food.*



If your child eats the same foods as you, ensure their food has no added sugar or sodium. If adding these to your food, set aside their portion first.[^]

Each exposure can look different. Meats can be ground or shredded while vegetables can be cubed, cut into strips, or mashed.

[^]USDA & HHS. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025 DGA: <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/> 9th Edition. December 2020.

*Scaglione, S et al. Factors Influencing Children's Eating Behaviours. Nutrients 2018.

MEALTIME IN ACTION

This pork looks juicy, feels soft, and is warm!



The tortilla is soft, what colors do you see on it?

This avocado is green, sounds squishy, and feels smooth.

The vegetables are different colors, which ones do you see?

GOING BEYOND 'YUCK' and 'YUM'

What does it look like?

Colorful	Goosey
Dry	Bumpy
Juicy	Shiny
Runny	

What does it feel like?

Chewy	Wet
Creamy	Mushy
Crunchy	Smooth
Dry	Sticky

What does it taste like?

Spicy	Sweet
Sour	Tart

What does it smell like?

Strong	Smokey
Fresh	Fruity
Minty	

What temperature is it?

Cool	Hot
Cold	Warm
Freezing	

What does it sound like?

Crunchy	Sizzling
Crispy	Squishy

POWERFUL WORDS TO USE DURING MEALTIME

"Good job trying a new food!"

"Wow! Did you notice everybody likes different foods on their plate?"

"What vegetable would you like to eat tomorrow?"

REFUSING FOOD? TRY THESE NEUTRAL PHRASES

"We can try this fruit together again another time."

"Next time, would you like to try your potatoes soft and smooth like mashed potatoes instead of roasted in pieces?"

"When you are ready, you can give it a try."

TIPS TO REMEMBER WHILE YOU PRACTICE YOUR NEW POWER LANGUAGE

- As a parent or caregiver, you decide what, when, and where the child eats; the child decides if and how much they will eat.
- Introduce new foods with current favorites – this may help acceptance.
- Young children don't eat a lot of food at a time, so they do not need to eat a certain amount at each sitting.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of each food at the table on your child's plate. Follow their lead, if your child eats a food, offer more- one tablespoon at a time.
- Because they eat small amounts at a time, make every bite count with healthy choices.

Visit https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/English_ReducingRiskofChokinginYoungChildren.pdf for information about choking hazards in children.

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