Introducing New Foods to Kids

Tips for Helping Kids Eat (and Like!) New, Healthy Foods

Start young.
The best time to form lifelong healthy eating habits is when kids are very young. Offer a variety of foods on a regular basis.

Pair the new with the familiar.
Instead of serving an entirely new meal, pair one new food with meals your child already enjoys. For example, cut up green beans and serve with macaroni and cheese.

Start small.
Start by serving a small amount of the new food and let your child know they can have more if they choose. Also, offer the new food before the rest of the meal, when your child is the hungriest.

Separate new ingredients.
If your child likes plain food, try serving the ingredients of a casserole separately before introducing it all together.

Make it FUN.
Choose colorful foods like tri-colored pasta or cut food into fun shapes with a cookie cutter. Encourage your child to make a happy face with the new food before trying it. Keep it interesting.
Include kids in meal planning.

Kids are more likely to try new foods when they’re involved in the planning process. Let your child plan a meal and take them grocery shopping for the ingredients. Let them help prepare the meal with small tasks in the kitchen or setting the table.

Be a good role model.

Kids want to be like the adult in their life. Be a good role model by trying new foods with your child.

Let them decide.

Instead of forcing your child to try something, ask them to describe the color, texture, and smell of the new food and let them make their own choice. Ask them what they think of it. Make it clear there is no right or wrong answer.

Make sure it is a positive learning experience.

Never discipline a child for not wanting to try something new or reward them with unhealthy snacks when they do. Instead, give them attention and encouragement. That’s what every child really needs.

If at first you don’t succeed, try again.

Don’t give up the first time your child refuses a new food. It may take a dozen attempts before they agree to try something. Be patient, understanding, and keep it fresh!
Choosing smart, fun snacks and meals for your family is a great way to get them excited about eating healthy and trying new foods!

**Bagel Caterpillar**
Split mini bagels in half. Cut each half into half circles. Spread the halves with toppings like tuna salad, egg salad, or peanut butter. Decorate with sliced cherry tomatoes or banana slices. Arrange the half circles to form the body of a caterpillar. Use olives or raisins for the eyes.

**Frozen Bananas & Frozen Juice Cups**
Put a wooden stick into a peeled banana. Cut large bananas in half first. Wrap in plastic wrap and freeze. Once frozen, peel off the plastic and eat. You can also pour 100% fruit juice into small paper cups. Freeze. To serve, peel off the paper and eat.

**Frozen Graham Cracker Sandwiches**
Mix mashed bananas and peanut butter, spread between graham crackers and freeze for a few hours.

**Fruit Smoothies**
Blend fresh or frozen fruit with low fat yogurt and milk or 100% juice. Try 100% orange juice, low-fat yogurt and frozen strawberries.

**Ants on a Log**
Thinly spread peanut butter on narrow celery sticks. Top with a row of raisins or other diced dried fruit.

**Smiley Sandwiches**
Top a slice of bread with peanut butter and use an apple slice for a smile and raisins for the eyes.
Fruit Cuts
Cut big pieces of fruit (such as cantaloupe, watermelon, or melon) and use fun cookie cutters to make bite-sized pieces of fruit with different shapes.

Garden Octopus
For the octopus’s body, remove the pepper’s stem end and scoop out the white ribs and seeds. For the arms, slice a second pepper into strips. Place some dip or hummus (such as French onion dip) in a shallow bowl, and arrange the octopus. Use a bit of dip and sliced black olives to give your creature eyes. Serve with extra veggies, such as carrot sticks, fresh green beans, lightly steamed broccoli spears, and sliced cucumbers.

Sandwich on a Stick
Cut up cubes of bread, cheese, and low-sodium turkey or ham. Slide the cubes onto a skewer with other foods your child likes, such as a grape tomato, a piece of lettuce, a pickle, or an olive. Set out a side of mayo or mustard for dipping.
Pulling together a family meal can get stressful. But starting good eating habits while kids are young can lead to a lifetime of healthy eating.

That’s why it’s important to set the stage early for kids to enjoy mealtimes and have a good relationship with food. You have the ability to make meals less stressful for you and more fun for the whole family!

Set aside at least 20 minutes for the meal
This will give you and your family plenty of time to relax, try different foods, and talk about things that matter to you. Taking 20 minutes for a meal can also help your family cut back on over-eating. It takes 20 minutes for the message to travel from your belly to your brain that you’re full!

Turn off the TV and computer
Distractions like TV, phones or computer games during a meal make it harder to talk as a family. Turning them off allows you to have pleasant discussions about the day’s events.

Sit down
Time things as best as you can so that you finish cooking and sit at the table with everyone else — it makes for a better experience for everyone.

Be a role model
Remember that you’re teaching your children habits that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Be a role model by eating healthy food choices at the meal, putting your phone away, and being fully present at the meal.

Let your kids help you
This will not only help you, but it helps your kids become more interested in their food and the meal. Let them help you shop for food, make some choices about which foods to serve, or help set the table.
Kids in the Kitchen — Forming Eating Habits One Meal at a Time

Asking kids to help in the kitchen is a great way to get them to try more new foods. Plus, kids are more likely to eat foods and meals that they helped plan or prepare.

As children grow, they are able to help out with different tasks in the kitchen. Some children may develop these skills at different ages — decide what works best with your child.

At 2 years:
» Wipe tables
» Hand items to adult to put away (after grocery shopping)
» Place things in trash
» Tear lettuce or greens
» Help “read” a cookbook by turning the pages
» Make “faces” out of pieces of fruits and vegetables
» Rinse vegetables or fruits
» Snap green beans

At 3 years:
All that a 2 year old can do, plus:
» Add ingredients
» Talk about cooking
» Scoop or mash potatoes
» Squeeze citrus fruits
» Stir pancake batter
» Knead and shape dough
» Name and count foods
» Help assemble a pizza

At 4 years:
All that a 3 year old can do, plus:
» Peel eggs and some fruits, such as oranges and bananas
» Set the table
» Crack eggs
» Help measure dry ingredients
» Help make sandwiches and tossed salads

At 5 years:
All that a 4 year old can do, plus:
» Measure liquids
» Cut soft fruits with a dull knife
» Use an egg beater

Also remember to use kitchen time to teach healthy, safe eating habits to your child.
Remind your child to:
» Always wash their hands with soap and water before working with food.
» Wash fruits and vegetables before eating, peeling, or cooking.
» Sneeze or cough into their upper arm when around food.