

Seven ways to encourage your children to explore and enjoy trying new and different foods



Children may or may not be naturally inclined to try new things but it is important help them explore their preferences by being exposed to a variety of foods. This will, in turn, help to set them up with a healthy relationship with food as they get older.

So even if your child is often ‘fussy’ when it comes to food, it’s never too early or late to start to integrate the tips below. The key is to take it slowly and to incorporate them in a way that works for you and your child.

Involve Your Child

Whether it’s by growing it, choosing it, or preparing it, children are often more willing to try a food or eat a meal that they’ve been involved in. Depending on their age, you could try involving them in whisking, pouring and stirring, or helping to set the table. Include them in picking a recipe or planning a menu and maybe let them invite a toy or two to the table sometimes – encourage them to get excited about food and interested in exploring it.

Offer New Foods

Serve one new food at a time and serve it alongside a food that your child likes and that’s familiar to them – too much too soon can overwhelm them. Even if they don’t try it the first time you offer it, just seeing it on their plate puts them one step closer to tasting it. Remember, you’ll need to keep trying. Research shows that some children

need to be served foods as many as 15 times before they decide that they like them, so perseverance is needed!

Small Portions

Just as too many new foods might overwhelm your child, so too will having too much on their plate. As well as wasting less food, small portions will allow your child to decide how much they want to eat and ask for more if they choose.

Make Food Fun

If your child's plate is colourful, their sandwich has been cut into a fun shape or their fruit and veg been arranged like a smiley face or rainbow, it might encourage them to eat it. Playing with food doesn't have to be a bad thing – making their plate look appealing to them creates excitement and fun and will encourage their interest in exploring variety.

Keep it Low-key

Provide a variety of foods for your child to try, but try to let them decide which ones they try and how much of them they want to eat. Ask them to try it, but avoid putting pressure on them and giving it too much attention – be low-key about it. If you don't make it a big deal, their curiosity may prompt them to give it a try before you even ask.

Offer Variety

Consider introducing one or two new foods a week. As you'll be repeating previously exposed foods gradually there won't be as many new foods for your little one to try and they'll soon get used to seeing a variety of foods. Try to be consistent and creative as you expand the foods they feel comfortable with, without adding pressure.

Only Offer One Meal

While it can be frustrating if you've taken time to prepare a meal only to have it refused, remember it takes time. Don't create an entirely separate meal just for your child, encourage them to eat what you and the rest of the family are eating, even if you have to dissect the meal.

For example, separate out a portion of rice for your child before adding the curry and then give them the curry in a jug on the side in case they'd like to try it, or serve their chilli without beans and offer a few beans in a separate bowl for them to touch, try or just look at. By having your child see all the foods on the table and watching others eating them will encourage them to do the same – chances are, if they see you enjoying it, they might be more inclined to try it.

There will be some foods that your child will genuinely not like - that is okay. Simply find an alternative and try again at a later date. All children are different and so different approaches will work for different children. It takes time and patience so

don't give up, keep offering a variety of foods and one day they may surprise you and not only eat something unexpected, but enjoy it!