

Childhood is an important time for experiencing different foods, developing eating behaviours and food likes and dislikes. The greater the variety of foods that your child is given to try, the greater the chance that they will eat a wide range of foods as an adult. Being patient and making sure meal times are happy and relaxed are the keys to successfully introducing a wider variety of foods, to help your child to be happy and healthy.

Tips for Parents:

- Make meal times fun, relaxed and positive; don't fuss over the mess
- Model positive behaviour if your child is a fussy eater
- Present foods in an interesting and exciting way
- Involve your children in decision making and preparation for meals

1. To help make introducing new foods to your child less stressful:

- Introduce new foods slowly
- Accept there may be waste – so only try small amounts of new foods
- Be prepared for mess and play with foods
- Don't force new foods; be prepared to calmly offer foods many times before they are accepted – new foods may need to be offered 10 times or more over a few weeks before they are fully accepted
- Start with small amounts of disliked foods (integrate them into other dishes) and gradually increase until successfully accepted
- Don't give up – keep presenting the new foods so they become familiar

2. Make meal times a positive experience:

- Model positive meal behaviour and food acceptance (e.g. try new foods yourself)
- Give praise and positive reinforcement
- Avoid using food as a reward or punishment
- Avoid making children finish their meals
- Try enjoying mealtimes with your children in a variety of environments (e.g. picnics)



3. If you are worried that your child isn't getting a balanced nutritional intake:

- Offer a variety of foods from each food group (breads and cereals, vegetables, fruits, dairy, meats/meat alternatives)
- Ensure that daycare/kindergarten/school environments are providing and promoting a variety of nutritious foods/meals and a positive meal environment
- Children don't always understand why adults insist they leave sweets till last. Provide nutritious fruit, milk and cereal based desserts, this way even if your child doesn't finish all their main meal a nutritious dessert can still be provided
- Don't become focused on the amount your child is eating each day
- Amounts eaten will vary from day to day. Look at what your children eat across a week. As long as they are growing well, and are healthy and happy, then they are getting what they need
- If you are worried about the amount of vegetables/meat that your child is eating, try a variety of ways to add them to other foods





Encouraging different foods to children

Healthy @ Home // www.naqlld.org

Nutrition Australia Qld

4. Allowing your child to fill up on non-nutritious foods or too many drinks, including milk, before meals can replace healthy foods they should be eating:

- Offer and encourage fresh healthy foods before processed prepackaged foods
- Limit sweet drinks (cordial, juice) especially before and during meals
- Offer water to drink at main mealtimes and a small glass of milk between meals
- Limit less healthy snacks such as potato chips and lollies to special occasions

5. Food preparation and presentation is important in encouraging children to accept different foods:

- Make food presentation interesting for children
 - Cut food into funny shapes
 - Make faces on the plate with food
- Allow children to be involved in the meal preparation
 - Let them help plan the weekly menu
 - Get children involved in shopping for or growing food
 - Plant a home-based vegetable garden
 - Let children help prepare meals and be involved in meal routines such as:
 - helping with getting the ingredients ready and cooking
 - setting the table
 - serving the meal – making shapes and patterns can be fun!

Wondering why your child might be fussy at meals? Are they:

- Tired?
- Unwell?
- Uncomfortable on their chair?
- Too distracted? Turn the television off and put games away
- Full from a previous meal or snack?
- Going to the toilet regularly or are they constipated*?
- Teething?
- Uncomfortable with different textures in food**?
- Having problems with tongue movement and/or speech development**?

Note: * if your child has a problem with constipation contact your local doctor
** for problems with enjoying different food textures and speech, contact a speech pathologist

Some fun and healthy meal ideas:

- Banana and oat pancakes
- Vegetable topped pita bread pizzas
- Chicken and vegetable rice muffins
- Oat and apple biscuits (using different shape cutters)
- Homemade berry yoghurt ice-cream

For more information:

- Nutrition Australia Qld Food Foundations Program. Ph 07 3257 4393
- Healthy recipes:
www.healthyfoodhealthyplanet.org/healthy-recipes/
- Fun not Fuss with Food :
www.health.qld.gov.au/health_professionals/food/funnotfusswithfood.asp
- Positive Parenting Program (Triple P): Contact your local Child, Youth and Family Services Ph 1800 177 279
- PARENTLINE: Confidential telephone counselling service for parents/carers. Ph: 1300 30 1300
- Childrens food game:
www.eatforhealth.gov.au/nutrition-calculators/food-balance