



PARENT EDITION ✓



EXTENSION
College of Agriculture,
Biotechnology & Natural Resources

Learning to Like New Foods

Cucumbers are cool!



FS-21-87

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Does it seem like your child only wants to eat the same foods every day? Did your child accept some foods as a baby (such as pureed spinach) but refuses to taste them now (such as steamed spinach leaves)? As adults, we have learned to enjoy many new flavors. Think about which foods you eat now that you wouldn't eat as a child. Over the years, we have discovered the taste of many foods we did not like as children.

HERE IS A PLAN THAT CAN HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN TO TASTE AND LIKE NEW FOODS – ESPECIALLY VEGETABLES!

Explore new foods with your child by helping them become familiar with the food's size, shape, look, feel, smell and other characteristics. Eating uses all five of the senses, and the senses can be used to enhance the eating experience.

MAKE IT AN ADVENTURE AT THE MARKET

As you are shopping with your child, you can point to foods and talk about each of them, such as pointing out the food's color, smell and texture. Select ONE fruit or vegetable that your child may not like or might not have tried before. Tell your child the food's name and let them give it to the cashier when you are ready to buy it.

IT TAKES TIME

A child's refusal to eat many foods may be frustrating but it is normal behavior. Before children learn to like a food, they have to be exposed to the food repeatedly, become familiar with the food and taste the food. This takes time. Some children are very sensitive to new tastes, especially bitter ones like those found in many vegetables. In fact, vegetables are the foods most likely to be refused.



MAKE MEMORIES

Senses trigger memories, which can last a lifetime. When shopping for, preparing and enjoying your favorite meal, the senses are being used and can trigger the special memories associated with what the food means to you, such as eating dinner together, making food as a family, and having conversations around the dinner table.

MAKE IT AN EXPERIMENT AT HOME

The first time you introduce a new vegetable or a food your child has previously refused, the two of you can explore the food together.

Try the Exploration Experiment (below) at snack time rather than at meal time, and remember, patience works better than pressure. Never pressure or force a child to eat and always use positive language. Teach language such as “I like it” or “I might like it next time,” instead of “I don’t like it”.

EXPLORATION EXPERIMENT

TOUCH

Feel the outside of the food. Does it feel smooth, hard or fuzzy, or have ridges; or, does it feel soft? How does the texture of the food feel on your fingers or when you take a bite?

SEE

Look at the food. What colors do you see? Use sight to appreciate the beauty of the food. Depending on the type of food, you may see different parts. If it’s a vegetable, how does the inside look when you cut it open?

EXPLORE

Play with the food. Pull it apart. Mash it in your fingers.

SMELL

Sniff the food. How does it smell? We use our nose to smell the flavors and scent of the food and to enhance the taste.

HEAR

Shake the food. Do you hear any sounds coming from it? What about when you eat it – does it make a sound? Can you think of a vegetable that makes a sound when you bite it?

TASTE

If your child is willing to taste the food, great! Does it taste sweet or salty? Is it soft or crunchy? Is it bitter, sour or spicy?

TRY AND TRY AGAIN

If children are reluctant for fear that they will have to swallow the food, give them a napkin or paper towel. Tell them that it will be okay if they want to just lick the food or try it and spit the bite of food into the napkin. Acknowledge and compliment children for trying, even if they didn't swallow the bite. For older children who might be watching, remind them that this is an experiment and not typically good manners to spit food out at the table. Teach them to discretely remove the food from their mouth into a napkin.

Finally, this process may take numerous tries before they will swallow the bite. Each step may need to occur on separate days and with separate attempts. Children may only get through one or two of the steps on a particular day before rejecting the food. If that happens, try again another time, and see if they'll go one step further than before. Children are more likely to enjoy a food when eating (and swallowing) is their own choice.



REFERENCES

Adapted from Teacher and Family Connections Curriculum: A Supplement to the All 4 Kids Program.