

Fussy Eaters – Trying new foods

How can we encourage children when trying a new food?

When introducing new foods to children, there are some simple steps you can take to encourage acceptance. These questions will help children to familiarise themselves with the 'new food' and hopefully be more willing to try the 'new food'.

1. Take the food in your hands - how does it feel?
2. Bring it up to your nose - how does it smell?
3. Touch it to your lips - how does it feel?
4. Hold it between your teeth - how do you feel?
5. Lick it – how does it feel? How does it taste?
6. Take a piece the size of your fingernail and place it on your chewing teeth (molars), chew and swallow (at this point take a piece of the food and demonstrate placing it between your back teeth on one side and your chewing motion)
7. Take another piece the size of your fingernail and place it in your mouth as you normally would (chew and swallow)

We want trying new foods to be a positive experience, so if a child is stressed about continuing with any of the stages, this process can be stopped and tried again later. If in doubt seek the help of an appropriate health professional, such as an Accredited Practising Dietitian.



Strategies or tips around trying new foods

- Don't give up too soon – it takes 10 -15 presentations before the brain stops identifying the food as new
- Ensure positive mealtimes by keeping calm and being clear and consistent with your messages
- Try new foods together as a family
- Try new foods outside usual mealtimes. For example during a picnic at the park
- Children have a small window of 'hunger' so offer nutritious meals and snacks when they are hungry, which may include new foods or combining new foods with familiar foods
- Ensure children are not filling up on unhealthy snacks prior to mealtimes when they are trying a new food
- Don't offer children a treat or a bottle after their meal as they may wait for this treat or drink to fill them up instead of trying new foods
- Try not to label a child as a fussy or picky eater. This can lead to the child then identifying themselves as a fussy eater or 'the child that doesn't eat vegetables' making them want to continue this behaviour ensuring their identity as the picky eater in the family
- Instead be positive and reinforce positive messages. For example saying things like "they are really good at trying new foods"
- Make the most of opportunities for children to try new foods. For example a child may grab a tomato at the supermarket. This means they are curious about the tomato and may be willing to get familiar with the tomato and try the tomato
- Be positive about food and keep a smile on your face. For example say "Yum! This tastes so fresh and healthy; did you know broccoli is good for your skin, muscles and bones?"
- Encourage children to be involved in food preparation and choice. For example "Would you prefer broccoli or zucchini as our green vegetable for dinner tonight?"
- Encourage children to grow some vegetables at home that they can water and watch grow before picking, preparing and eating
- Role model healthy food behaviours as children will mimic your behaviours and eat the foods you are eating



Don't forget that children need to get 'messy' and experiment with food.