

## Tips for Introducing Different Flavors and Textures

Early childhood caregivers have an important role in shaping the food preferences of children in their care. Exposure to new and different foods is needed both to provide nutrients, and so that infants and toddlers learn to like them.

### Tips for Introducing Different Flavors and Textures for Children 6 to 12 months

- **Create a pleasant mealtime environment** offering only healthy food. Take your time feeding each baby while still tuning into the other babies in your care. Try smiling at one baby, talking with a second, and gently patting a third.
- **Offer healthy foods of different textures and flavors**, such as soft or cooked vegetables and fruits. Once baby is experienced with and able to manage smooth purees, introducing 'lumpy' textures can help them accept a greater variety of fruits and vegetables as toddlers, and even at school age.
- **Take your time and be patient** while offering new, healthy food. Introduce a new food alongside (not mixed with) a familiar food. Continue to try offering the food during different feeding occasions. It may take as many as 8 tries before a baby learns to like a food. When introducing a new food, it's okay to offer just a spoonful, alongside (not mixed with) the familiar food.
- **Support a baby's attempts to self-feed.** Let each baby explore different food items and tastes with her/his hands. Prepare for messiness – like you would prepare for finger painting or playing with clay! Note that this practice may not be accepted in different cultures. Engage parents in talking about how you can honor family traditions and also encourage self-feeding.
- **If a baby makes a "face"** that looks like he/she does not like the food, be patient and keep offering if baby shows signs of hunger such as leaning forward with open mouth. If baby refuses this particular food during this eating occasion, try a small taste tomorrow. It does not necessarily mean that the baby does not like the food. This can be a normal reaction to a new food.
- **Trust each baby's hunger and fullness cues** and never pressure a baby to eat. Let babies decide when they are ready to eat or stop eating. Allow babies to learn how much food they need to consume.
- **Model enthusiastically eating a variety of healthy foods** in front of babies and keep unhealthy food (chips, sweet drinks, fried foods, etc.) out of their environment.

- Once established, **try keeping a baby's feeding routine as consistent as possible**, but be sensitive to each baby's needs during developmental transitions. Consistency helps caregivers manage the feeding of multiple children each day.

## **Tips for Introducing Different Flavors and Textures for Children 12 to 24 Months**

- **Create a pleasant eating environment**
  - **Provide age-appropriate utensils** such as baby spoons, toddler plates, and small cups. This supports the development of fine motor skills as well as allows the toddler to decide when to start and stop eating.
  - **Sit with the toddlers during mealtime** and have them facing each other to create a family-style eating environment.
  - **Create a pleasant, social environment** that is not rushed. Avoid distractions, such as T.V., cell phones, etc. Distractions make it hard for children to focus on eating, and divided attention can make it less likely that they will notice when they are full.
  - **Establish an eating routine** offering 3 meals and 2 snacks at AROUND the same time every day, when toddlers are typically hungry.
- **Provide only healthy food**
  - **Serve only healthy meals and snacks.**
  - **Offer healthy food in a form appropriate for the child's age** and that is easy to chew and swallow.
  - **Do not have or consume unhealthy food** around the children.
  - **Introduce a variety** of foods from each food group.
  - **Focus on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, proteins, and full-fat dairy at 12-24 months.** Limit added salt, sugar, and solid fats.
- **Engage in responsive feeding practices**
  - **Serve as a positive role model for healthy eating.** Model enthusiastically by eating the foods that the children are eating and commenting positively on them. Even if you don't like a food, don't make faces or say that out loud. Your opinion, good or bad, will influence children's preferences. Emphasize the good!

- **Continue to offer healthy food even if the toddler rejects it multiple times.** Remember, offering means putting the food on the plate, not forcing the child to eat it. Continuing to offer healthy foods helps children to learn that group meals will not be catered to their individual needs, and if they don't like a food, they can leave it on their plate.
- **Be patient with each toddler.** Toddlers go through transitions in what and how they like to eat.
- **Let toddlers use all their senses to explore new food.** Smelling, licking, touching, and playing with new foods helps toddlers learn to like them.
- **Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues** and don't pressure toddlers to finish their food.
- **Talk with the toddlers and create a joyful, bonding experience.** Respond to toddler's verbal and non-verbal requests. Describe what they are doing and the food they are eating. Use new vocabulary such as juicy, crunchy, or delicious.