

# Helping your child accept more foods

## Are you concerned about your child's acceptance of a variety of foods?

### You are not alone...

- One in 5 children have feeding difficulties in the first 5 years. One in 10 will develop a more serious problem.
- Like walking and talking, learning to eat a variety of foods is a skill that develops over time.
- The first time children see or try a new food, they often find it different. It may take up to 15 or more times before they are comfortable with it.
- Children's tastes change as they grow. They may enjoy a food one day and not the next. Preschoolers will often eat a large amount of one type of food for a few days and then switch to another food. This is not usually something to worry about as children will often eat enough different foods over the course of a week.

### You can help...

#### Learn about food through play and exploration:

- Explore foods with your child during grocery shopping, preparing meals, setting the table, and play time.
- Involve your child in choosing foods to buy, prepare or explore.
- Encourage your child to touch, smell, look at and interact with new foods even without eating them. It's good for children to use all their senses to become more familiar and comfortable with foods. They may put new foods into their mouths and pull them back out while they are learning, this is ok.

#### Talk about food with your child:

- Focus on describing the food: taste, temperature, texture and flavour (juicy, crunchy, warm, cold, chewy, salty, spicy) rather than whether it tastes good or bad.



### Reach out to your healthcare team if your child continues to:

- eat a limited variety of foods
- not try new foods or
- behave in a way while eating that causes stress and anxiety for your family

### Keep these goals for your child in mind...

- to build comfort with a variety of foods
- to learn about new foods
- to enjoy eating food

### Having meals together

is important to help children learn to eat a variety of foods.



***Celebrate your family's foods together!***

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### Show your child how you explore food:

- Watch how your child interacts with a new food and follow their lead.
- Show your child how you touch, smell, look at and interact with food using all your senses. This can help them build comfort with the food and they may even follow your lead.
- Show you are curious about exploring a variety of foods.

### Keep meals and snacks positive:

- Take the focus off your child at mealtimes. Focus instead on meal times as social times and an opportunity for conversation, telling stories, and talking about your day.
- Let them know they do not have to eat a new food. Reassure them they can explore foods in many different ways (looking, smelling, touching with a utensil, touching on your body, tasting, eating).

### Keep meal and snack times consistent:

- Set up a routine. Offer meals and snacks at about the same time most days.
- Sit together to enjoy meals as a family whenever possible.
- Offer a variety of nutritious foods (including new foods) both at snack and mealtimes.

### Serve small portions:

- Give your child a small plate.
- Try passing around a dish of food so each person can serve him or herself. Your child may surprise you by taking a new food.
- Serve your child a small amount of food at a time, this gives your child a chance to ask for more.

### Respect your child's appetite:

- It is important for children to learn to eat when they are hungry and that when they are not hungry they don't have to eat. This helps them to learn to recognize and listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues.
- When your child is hungry, he or she will be more interested in trying new foods.

### Be patient:

- It can take months or years to become comfortable with a variety of foods.

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### Things that can get in the way...

- Having food available at all times of the day can result in your child actually eating less food overall. If your child has at least 2 hours between eating, he or she will feel hungry for snacks and meals.
- Distractions such as TV or other screens during meals can interfere with participating in mealtimes. Turn them off.
- Labeling types of a food as “good” or “bad” can make your child worry about eating that food and feel bad about the foods they eat. Instead, celebrate all foods. This is especially important when your child has a very limited number of foods that he or she eats comfortably.
- Making your child take a bite when they are not ready can be very stressful and make them more uncomfortable about new foods. Using tricks or games to encourage your child to eat more can interfere with your child’s trust in food and you.
- Focusing on what or how much your child eats can create mealtime stress. Your child’s stress can contribute to behaviours that make mealtimes difficult for everyone.

### Additional resources:

Access the following resources and more on the PEAS Website ([peas.ahs.ca](https://peas.ahs.ca))

- If you are worried about your child’s feeding, you can use the “[Is Feeding a Struggle](#)” questionnaire to better understand and identify any areas of concern

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, or treatment. If you have questions, talk with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.

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