

Question: How can I get my toddler to try new foods?

Let your toddler decide what and how much to eat from an assortment of nutritious foods you offer. Trust your child's ability to know when she or he is hungry and full. If your child asks for more, provide a small, additional portion. If he or she stops eating, accept this decision. Don't worry too much about messes made during mealtimes. Young children learn from experimenting and you can promote the life skill of Self Directed, Engaged Learning by encouraging and allowing exploration and experimentation.

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning: It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

1

Allow your child to explore and experiment.

Learning to try new foods is one aspect of learning to explore and experiment. You can promote the skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning by letting your child explore the new food. He or she may want to smell it, touch it, look at it and taste it. These actions are a great sign that your child is learning and will, hopefully, feel comfortable to try a new food.

2

Create a routine for peaceful mealtimes.

People—both children and adults—don't learn to explore without first feeling safe. Your child will feel safer if you set up predictable routines around mealtimes. Routines can include having meals at regular times or in regular places. It can also include having traditions around eating, such as beginning a meal with saying what you are thankful for or singing a mealtime song.

2

Establish positive eating patterns.

Include your toddler in family meals by providing a high chair or booster seat at table height. Adults need to provide children meals and snacks at regular intervals. Feed your toddler three meals and two or three planned snacks a day. Foods offered should be nutritious and healthy, with only moderate amounts of sweets. Toddlers gain weight more slowly than during the first year, so your toddler may eat less now than he or she did as an infant. Toddlers' appetites also vary; they will eat a lot at one time and not much the next time.

3

Be a role model.

Have you noticed that when your child approaches something new or forbidden, he or she looks to you to try to figure how you feel about it? In a sense, your child is checking to

find out, "Is this okay?" Babies rely on their parents' facial expressions to figure out whether to try something new or not. If the parent smiles at the child or nods, the child is likely to try something new. If, on the other hand, the parent makes a face that expresses fear, the child will become frightened too.

You can help your child learn to try new foods by being a good role model.

- When you say, "I never tasted this kind of fruit before, but I want to try it," you are setting a good example.
- You can make new food look and taste appealing. If you experiment with different textures, colors and flavors in the foods you offer, your child will be more likely to experiment too.

4

Offer choices.

Children are more likely to learn to explore when they have a sense of control. In this case, it is helpful to give toddlers specific choices. That doesn't mean being a short-order cook. Nor does it mean giving unlimited options. Asking your child, "What do you want to eat?" may be overwhelming.

- It is better to provide limited choices: "Would you like a banana or an apple?"

5

Remember learning to try new things is a process.

Children's responses to new experiences can reflect an inborn temperamental difference. If you have a child who seems like a picky eater, don't push him or her too hard or too fast, but encourage your child to try just a bite. And to try again and again. But if this food just doesn't appeal to your child, find something else that does.