

# TIPS FOR GETTING MY KIDS TO TRY NEW FOOD

Don't read these tips as individual "magic bullets." Many of these ideas work well when used in combination with a number of other ideas, so read through the list and begin to consider what you might want to begin to implement in your home. As a parent, you also need to remember that every child is different, and what works for one of your kids may not work for another. It may take a bit of trial and error, but do your best to stay consistent and try not to give in too easily.

1. **Try To Stay Calm** – The more worked up you become, typically, the more frustrated they will become. Try not to make the dinner table a war zone... that's no fun for anyone involved. Keep in mind that, as much as you may want your child to eat their broccoli or brussel sprouts, you probably also want to make your family dinner time a happy place, not a nightly fight.
2. **Reduce Snacking Before Dinner** – Most would believe that a hungry child is more willing to try something new or eat the healthy food that they may have turned their nose up at in the past.
3. **Don't Make Them Eat An Entire Serving** – When bringing new foods to the table, it is important to introduce variety, cultivate curiosity, and encourage healthy eating. It is less important with new food to worry about whether or not the child ate an entire serving. Encourage them to try one bite. In many houses, the rule is to try at least one bite or there will be no dessert. Don't make a big deal of it either way.
4. **Make It A Habit** – Be intentional and plan to regularly introduce new foods to your children. They are more likely to open up and try new things if it is presented to them often. If they only see a new vegetable once every few months, there is a greater chance you'll have a fight on your hands.
5. **Let Them Help** – If children help in the kitchen and in the garden, they are more excited and willing to try the food they have helped prepare or have helped water and harvest from the backyard. Kids take on a real sense of ownership and enjoy being a part of the process. They may even encourage others around the table to try new foods because they have a vested interest in the process.



6. **Don't Offer Substitutions Or Make Special Kids Meals** – This is a challenging one, and one that many parents may struggle to give up. If your child knows that there is plain pasta waiting for them if they don't eat the "new stuff," there is very little incentive or motivation to try what they don't know. Many parents also worry that their children will go to bed hungry if they don't give in and give them something before they go to bed. Kids will eat when they are hungry, so do your best not to default to the yogurt or peanut butter sandwich.
7. **Eat New Foods And Enjoy Them Yourself** – Eating new foods is contagious. Be sure to set a good example for your kids, even if the cooked carrots make you a bit nauseous. Have a few bits and be appreciative for all the food on the table.
8. **Start At The Store** – When your children are still young, find a way to get them interested and engaged in the produce aisle at the grocery store. Show the kids the different colours, describe how different vegetables and fruit grow, and let them put some things in the cart. Introducing it at the store will make it easier to put it on the table at home.
9. **No Complaints Rule** – If there are older children at home, look to enforce a no complaints rule. The younger children will learn by example and follow everyone else at the dinner table.
10. **"I Don't Like It" Rule** – Along the same vein as the no complaints rule, the "I don't like it" rule says that no one is allowed to say they don't like a certain food until they have tasted it at least 5 to 10 times. It is not unusual to be a little wary the first time you eat something. By trying it multiple times, children may begin to enjoy the taste. Don't let them off the hook after one bite. Ultimately, let your children know that it's okay to not enjoy a certain food, but remind your children that it is also okay to eat food when you are hungry that may not be your favourite item.
11. **Try Soups** – Some parents swear by this technique for getting their kids to try new foods. Purees are good ways to introduce new flavours and it's easier to throw in a few small bits and bites of something new. Chicken soup with a taste of zucchini might just do the trick.
12. **Invite An Adventurous Friend To Dinner** – Peer pressure can get such a bad rap... why not use it for good things? Sometimes all it takes is for a friend to grab a piece of broccoli for your own child to be willing to give it a try. It's also interesting what your kids will try to eat at other people's houses. Work together with the parents in the neighbourhood to get all the kids eating in a healthy way.



13. **Let Them Pick It Off Your Plate** – Children are more inclined to eat foods if they see their parents eating it first. Having them graze off your plate may be a great way to get them started.
14. **Hide The Veggies** – This is actually easier than most parents can imagine. It is amazing what a food processor can do to help you include healthy items in your regular everyday food. Mashed potatoes with cauliflower or a pumpkin burger are nice ways to get healthy foods into your picky eater. When hiding the veggies, keep the sizes smaller, as the food is less likely to overpower the overall taste of the recipe.
15. **Set Your Child’s Expectations** – If the fish sticks or chili are different than what your kids thought, you may have trouble on your hands at dinner. Don’t surprise your kids with something new or different; have a short conversation with them before dinner about what they can expect. You might say, “This chili is a bit different this time because I added a few carrots” or, “These fish sticks don’t have the same batter on them that you are used to, this is more of a sauce.” These simple conversations before their plate is set in front of them can make all the difference in how your children respond.
16. **Taste While Cooking** – Close to the time of your recipe being ready to eat, invite your children into the kitchen for a quick taste. This process helps set expectations, but can also provide an opportunity to make a few adjustments. Don’t ask your child if they liked it, but ask for their advice. “Is it too sweet?” “Is it too salty?” Let your kids add a little something to the recipe to adjust the taste slightly. They will typically be much more excited about dinner, or at least willing to give it a shot if they have played a small role in the process.
17. **Talk To Your Kids** – As your children get old enough to have logical conversations, you may decide to have a short talk with them about how taste buds can mature and grow and be “stretched” to enjoy new foods. Just like you can’t begin playing hockey at a high level until you learn how to skate properly, children (and adults) need to exercise their taste buds over time so they can begin to enjoy new flavours. Paint the picture for your kids of thinking about trying new foods a few times as taking skating lessons so that you can one day play hockey.
18. **Keep As Much Routine As Possible** – Children do love routine. Routine can make children feel comfortable and put them at ease. If everything in their life is chaotic or unpredictable, they may be less willing to try new foods because what they really want to eat is what they know. Try and have dinner around the same time each evening. Sit together at the table. Listen quietly to some music they may enjoy. Let them sit at their favourite spot at the table. All of these elements can bring a sense of peace, which may open up their mind for something new on their plate.

