



Introducing Children to New Tastes and Textures

Childhood is an exciting time. Children love to discover and explore. They also like to exert control, often over the foods they will eat. Here are some tips to help young children willingly explore new tastes and textures.

No Pressure

- Children (and adults!) are less likely to eat and enjoy food when pressured to eat it. A new food to a child may be a familiar food to you. Allow the children to explore the food at their own pace.
- Encourage children to eat or try a new food in a non-pressuring manner. For instance, read a book about a new food that will be served that day. Serve the new food at snack time when children are hungrier and have fewer food choices. Notice the cycle menus include menu items at the snack that might be served as part of a larger meal.
- Offer new foods to children many times instead of only once or twice. The more exposure that children have to a food, the more familiar and comfortable it becomes. Thus, the more likely it is that they will try the food. One way to introduce new fruits and vegetables is through a Mystery Box/Bag Activity; find one in Grow It, Try It, Like It! Available from Team Nutrition (www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it).

Explore and Learn

- Engage children in food experiences. Visit farmer's markets or make one of your own from grocery store purchases. Try cooking with children; snack time is a great time to have children involved with food. Do a demonstration of the snack recipe or allow children to make a sample tray; your staff can prepare the snack served to all if food safety is a concern.
- Take children on a walking tour that includes the kitchen. Help them learn about the way foods are prepared. Introduce the staff to the children to create a personal connection.

Families Can Help

- Enlist help from home. When children have similar foods at home, they are more likely to eat them at child care. The recipes in the cycle menus are available in smaller, home size recipes. Share these resources with families.
- Consider having samples of new recipes available to parents to taste during conferences or special events. Chances are your families are looking for new recipes, too.

Role Models Matter

- Have staff eat with children and eat the same foods as children. Make mealtime a pleasant time for conversation, including talking about the foods on the menu. Go beyond expressing likes and dislikes.
- Have a positive attitude toward foods and the mealtime experience. Remember, the excitement and willingness to taste foods shown by adults and other children may influence reluctant eaters to try.
- Offer the new food first to a child who eats most foods. Children will often follow the leader and try the food.

Respect Children's Appetites and Preferences

- Do not force a child to eat. It is normal for a child to ask for second helpings of food one day and yet eat very lightly the next day. The same is true for meals and snacks within a day.
- When introducing a new menu item or food to children, consider starting with a sample size or "just a bite" portion. Allow children to politely remove food from their mouths with a napkin if they do not want to swallow the food.

Adapted Source: New York State Department of Health. (2020). *Ways to encourage children to have positive attitudes toward food*. <https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/resources/attitudes.htm>

Flavor Shakers

Great on Potatoes

2 tablespoons dill weed
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon onion powder

1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon dried parsley
1 tablespoon dried sage



Great on Squash and Carrots

2 tablespoons cinnamon
1 tablespoon ground cloves
1 tablespoon ground ginger

1 tablespoon nutmeg



Great on Vegetables and French Fries

2 tablespoons chili powder
2 tablespoons cumin
1 tablespoon crushed red pepper

1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon granulated garlic



Great on Vegetables

2 tablespoons black pepper
1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon paprika

1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon garlic powder



Additional Shaker Ideas

1. Low-sodium lemon pepper
2. Crushed red pepper flakes
3. Grated Parmesan cheese and dried parsley
4. Course ground black pepper and granulated garlic



Adapted Source: Team Nutrition Iowa. (2018). *Flavor shakers*. <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/FLAVOR%20SHAKERS%20CACFP.pdf>

Cooking with Herbs and Spices

Using a variety of herbs and spices in cooking is a healthy way to add flavor to foods without adding a lot of sodium and sugar. The charts below are a starting point for thinking about how you can use herbs and spices to replace sodium and sugar in recipes.

Name	Form	Taste	Uses
Anise seed	Whole, ground	Sweet licorice flavor	Cookies, cakes, fruit mixtures, chicken
Basil	Fresh, dried chopped leaves	Mint licorice flavor	Pizza, spaghetti sauce, tomato dishes, vegetable soups, meat pies, peas, zucchini, green beans
Bay leaves	Whole, ground	Pungent and sharp with a slight bitter taste	Fish, soups, tomato juice, potato salad dressing
Caraway seed	Whole	Sharp and pungent	Baked goods such as rye bread, cheeses, sauerkraut dishes, soups, meats, stews
Celery Seed	Whole, ground	Flavor distinctly different from celery	Fish, soups, tomato juice, potato salad
Chives	Fried, freeze-dried	In the onion family; delicate flavor	Baked potato topping, all cooked green vegetables, green salads, cream sauces, cheese dishes
Cilantro	Fresh, dried	Sweet aroma, mildly peppery	Ingredient in Mexican foods
Coriander seed	Whole, ground	Pleasant, lemon-orange flavor	Ingredient in curry; ground form used in pastries, buns, cookies, and cakes; in processed foods such as frankfurters
Cumin	Whole seeds, ground	Warm, distinctive, salty-sweet, resembles caraway	Ingredient in chili powder and curry powder; German cooks add to pork and sauerkraut, and Dutch add to cheese
Dill	Fresh, dried, seeds	Aromatic, like caraway but milder and sweeter	Dill pickles; seeds in meats, sauces, salads, coleslaw, potato salad, and cooked macaroni; dill weed in salads, sandwiches, and uncooked mixtures
Fennel seed	Whole	Flavor similar to anise, pleasant sweet licorice	Bread, rolls, apple pies, seafood, pork and poultry dishes; provides the distinctive flavor to Italian sausage

Name	Form	Taste	Uses
Marjoram	Fresh, dried whole or ground	Faintly sage-like, slight mint aftertaste, delicate	Vegetables; one of the ingredients in poultry and Italian seasoning; processed foods such as bologna
Mint	Fresh leaves or dried flakes	Strong and sweet with a refreshing aftertaste	Peppermint is the most common variety; popular flavor for candies and frozen desserts; many fruits, peas, and carrots
Oregano	Fresh, dried leaves, ground	More pungent than marjoram, reminiscent of thyme	Pizza, other meat dishes, cheese and egg dishes; vegetables such as tomatoes, zucchini, or green beans; an ingredient in chili powder
Parsley	Fresh, dried flakes	Sweet, mildly spicy, refreshing	A wide variety of cooked foods, salad dressings, and sandwich spreads
Poppy seed	Whole, crushed	Nut flavor	Whole as a topping for breads; over noodles and pasta or rice; in vegetables such as green beans
Rosemary	Fresh, whole leaves	Refreshing, pine, resinous, pungent	Chicken dishes and vegetables such as eggplant, turnips, cauliflower, green beans, beets, and summer squash; enhances the flavor of citrus fruits
Sage	Whole, rubbed, ground	Pungent, warm, astringent	Meats, poultry stuffing, salad dressings; cheese; a main ingredient in poultry seasoning blend; an ingredient in a wide variety of commercial meat products
Savory	Fresh, dried whole or ground	Warm, aromatic, resinous, delicate sage flavor	Beans, meats, soups, salads, sauces; an ingredient in the poultry seasoning blend
Sesame seed	Whole	Toasted nut flavor	Rolls, bread, and buns
Tarragon	Fresh, dried leaves	An aroma with a hint of anise; licorice flavor, pleasant, slightly bitter	Vinegar, salad dressings, chicken, tartar sauce, and egg salad
Thyme	Fresh, dried whole or ground	Strong, pleasant, pungent clove flavor	New England clam chowder, Creole seafood dishes, Midwest poultry stuffing; blended with butter is good over green beans, eggplant, and tomatoes
Turmeric	Dried, powder	Aromatic, warm, mild	Prepared mustard; a main ingredient in curry powder; chicken and seafood dishes, rice, creamed or mashed potatoes, macaroni; salad dressing for a seafood salad; in melted butter for corn on the cob

Spice Chart

Name	Form	Taste	Uses Allspice
	Whole berries, ground	The aroma suggests a blend of cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg; sweet flavor	Fruit cakes, pies, relishes, preserves, sweet yellow vegetables, such as sweet potatoes and tomatoes
Cardamom seed	Whole, ground	Mild, pleasant, sweet ginger-like flavor	Baked goods, apple and pumpkin pies; an essential ingredient in curry
Cinnamon	Whole sticks, ground	Warm, spicy and sweet flavor	Cakes, buns, and breads
Cloves	Whole, ground	Hot, spicy, sweet, penetrating flavor	Whole cloves for baking hams and other pork, pickling fruits, and in stews and meat gravies; ground cloves in baked goods and desserts and to enhance the flavor of sweet vegetables, such as beets, sweet potatoes, and winter squash
Ginger	Fresh, whole, cracked, ground	Aromatic, sweet, spicy, penetrating flavor	Baked goods; rubbed on meat, poultry, and fish; in stir-fry dishes
Mace	Ground	Strong nutmeg flavor	The thin red network surrounding the nutmeg fruit; used in baked goods where a color lighter than nutmeg is desirable
Mustard	Whole seeds, powder, prepared	Sharp, hot, very pungent	Meats, poultry, fish, sauces, salad dressings, cheese and egg dishes; whole seeds in pickling and boiled beets, cabbage, or sauerkraut

Nutmeg	Whole, ground	Spicy, pleasant flavor	The seed of the nutmeg fruit for baked goods, puddings, sauces, vegetables; in spice blends for processed meat; next with butter for corn on the cob, spinach, and candied sweet potatoes
Paprika	Ground	Sweet, mild, or pungent flavor	A garnish spice gives an appealing appearance to a wide variety of dishes; used in the production of processed meats such as sausage, salad dressings, and other prepared foods
Peppercorns: black, white, red, and pink	Whole, ground, coarse ground	Hot, biting, very pungent	Many uses in a wide variety of foods; white pepper ideal in light-colored foods where dark specks might not be attractive
Red pepper (cayenne)	Ground, crushed	Hot, pungent flavor	Meats and sauces

Standard Blends of Herbs and Spices

Name	Ingredients	How it is used
Barbeque spice	Cumin, garlic, cloves, paprika, and other ingredients: chili pepper, salt, sugar	Barbeque sauce, salad dressing, meat casseroles, potatoes
Chili powder	Cumin, garlic, oregano, cloves, allspice, powdered onion, and other ingredients: chili pepper, salt	Chili con carne, gravy, meat stews
Curry powder	Ginger, turmeric, cloves, cinnamon, cumin, black and red pepper, fenugreek seed (a spice specific to this blend)	Indian curry dishes, curry sauces, French dressing, scalloped tomatoes, fish chowders, split pea soup
Poultry seasoning	Sage, thyme, marjoram, savory, sometimes rosemary	Poultry and other stuffing, meatloaf; biscuits served with poultry

Adapted Source: Institute of Child Nutrition. (n.d.). *Culinary techniques for healthy school meals* (2nd ed.). University, MS: Author.