

10 Ways to Support a Child's Diverse Eating Habits

Encouragement, a positive atmosphere, and a child's development help them bravely try new foods. Changes in a child's eating habits don't happen overnight. These 10 tips can help expand a child's diet.



1 Serve new flavors alongside familiar favorites.

Don't hide food on the plate. Tell the child what's on it and encourage them to taste. Always include something the child likes at each meal.

2 Present foods in a way that makes them easy to recognize.

Food may taste better if different items aren't mixed together.

3 Encourage tasting without pressure.

Tasting is not mandatory. Don't pressure or guilt the child into eating. Comparing them to other children can reduce their appetite. Praise even small successes.

4 Serve small portions.

If possible, let the child serve themselves the amount they want. They can take more if they wish. A large portion may intimidate them at the start of the meal.

5 Eat together with the child.

Food tastes better when the whole family eats the same meal. You can use fewer spices in the child's portion. Shared mealtimes make eating a pleasant and anticipated moment. Children learn by watching others.

6 Create a calm mealtime environment.

Phones, games, and toys don't belong at the table. Give the child time to finish playing before eating. Set an example — don't answer your phone or watch TV while eating.

7 Cook together with the child.

A young child can wash potatoes, and an older child can make a salad. When chopping vegetables, they may taste them too. Encourage and praise everything they do.

8 Offer food regularly.

Regular meals are important, even if the child doesn't eat much every time.

9 Talk positively about eating.

Give positive feedback for small things, like sitting at the table. It can be frustrating if the child doesn't eat, but try to stay calm. Children notice if a parent is worried or upset.

10 Take a relaxed approach to food.

A positive and flexible attitude supports everyone's well-being. Don't overemphasize healthiness or label foods as "good" or "bad." Treats can be part of a balanced diet. Avoid using treats as rewards.

This material has been produced in collaboration with the Niitty 2 – Together for the Well-being of Immigrant Families project and the Finnish Heart Association's Neuvokas Perhe program.