

# Introducing Toddlers to New Foods

## Growing a Good Taster

### Switch Goals

**The key to introducing toddlers to new foods is to switch goals:**

Stop trying to get kids to eat new foods and start teaching them the habit of **happily** tasting new foods. Happy, confident tasters become happy, confident, and healthy eaters.

### The DOs and DON'Ts of Growing Good Tasters

**DO** Stop trying to get kids to eat new foods and start teaching them the habit of tasting new foods. (Eating comes later!)

**DO** Use a pea-sized sample of food for all tastings.

**DO** Emphasize exploration. Ask children to describe something about the food.

**DO** Use both children's positive and their negative comments about foods to explore more. Ask, "What about the food don't you like?" and, "How does this food compare to the food you tasted yesterday? Is it sweeter? Saltier? Crunchier?"

**DO** Make sure you put treats into the tasting rotation. Most children enjoy tasting new flavors of ice cream and cookies. Mixing all kinds of food into the new food experience changes children's attitude toward *new*—and that's the change you're after!

**DO** Encourage children to re-taste a new food until that food is no longer "new" to them. This is how you'll expose children to new foods enough times.

**DO** Celebrate every small step. Learning to be comfortable around new foods is like learning to walk: crawling turns into toddling, which turns into walking, and then running! (You'd never say, "What? You only walked two steps? I was hoping you'd run across the room.") Communicate success every step of the way.

**DON'T** ask children to taste new foods "blind." Tell them something about the taste or texture so they'll know what to expect. "This is a kiwi. It is a little squishy...kind of like strawberries."

**DON'T** pressure children to taste a new food they don't want to taste. They'll just end up saying they don't like it. Instead, encourage reluctant tasters to use their other senses. Start with "safe" senses like sight and smell.

**DON'T** ask children to *eat* a serving of something they have just tasted. Eating comes later.

**DON'T** say, "Just taste it, if you don't like it you don't have to eat it." This makes kids think they *might* have to eat what they've just tasted. Instead, ask kids to describe something about the new food.

**DON'T** tell children they can't spit the tasting food out. Do teach them to spit discretely!

**DON'T** expect children to like what they're tasting—that's why they're tasting, not eating—until they've tasted the same new food multiple times—maybe as often as 10 times!

**DON'T** take what children say about new foods too seriously. Remember children under 5 don't have stable taste preferences. They do have stable ideas about what they *think* they want to eat! This is why you're encouraging tasting, not eating!