

# Introducing New Foods to Your Child

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Feeding is a multi-sensory experience and can be overwhelming for some children. They may be fearful of food and may limit what they eat to just a few familiar foods. There are a lot of ways we can help you introduce new foods to your child, even before eating. Here are a few ideas.

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## Help your child learn about mealtimes

If possible, include your child in shopping and food preparation. This can be as simple as holding a spoon.

Even if your child isn't eating food yet, they can become more comfortable with food by watching family members eat. Mealtimes are about eating, but they are also a time to enjoy each other's company.

Have a beginning and ending ritual to meals, like washing hands, and setting and cleaning the table.

Serve food family style with everyone passing the food and serving themselves. Help your child to serve food onto their plate. (Some children do not tolerate food directly in front of them. If this is the case, your child's plate can be pushed back or a small second plate can be used for non-preferred foods.)

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## Help your child tolerate food in front of them

When your child is sitting at the table with you, talk about the food. Even if your child does not interact or taste the food, remind them what was served. You can say, "We had applesauce, carrots and chicken for dinner."

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## Help your child tolerate the smell of food

Have your child nearby while you make food. If the smells are too much for your child, use a fan to move the smell away.

At meals or snacks, model how to smell the food first and then offer your child to take a turn. Bring the food close to your child's nose to smell.

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## Help your child tolerate the feel of food

Please use the "Steps to Eating" on the next page to help your child get to know food. Build trust with them; try not to force it.

Offer an empty spoon at meals for a child to get used to the spoon before any food is offered.

If your child is in a highchair, put a small amount of food directly on the tray for them to look at, touch and smell.

### To Learn More

- Occupational and Physical Therapy  
206-987-2113
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

## Steps to Eating with Examples

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### 1 Tolerates

- Being in the same room
- Being at the table with the food on the other side of the table
- Being at the table with the food halfway across the table
- Being at the table with the food almost in front of child
- Looks at food when it's directly in front

### 2 Interacts with

- Helps prepare/set up food
- Uses utensils or a container to stir or pour food/drink
- Uses utensils or a container to serve self

### 3 Smells

- Odor in room
- Odor at table
- Odor directly in front of child
- Leans down or picks up to smell

### 4 Touches

- Fingertips
- Whole hand
- Lips
- Teeth
- Tip of tongue, full tongue

### 5 Tastes

- Licks lips, tongue licks food
- Bites off piece and spits out immediately
- Bites pieces, holds in mouth for a few seconds and spits out
- Bites, chews a few times and spits out
- Chews, partially swallows
- Chews, swallows with drink

### 6 Eats

