



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Supporting Choosy Eaters

You may notice your child says “no” to new foods and/or foods he used to eat. The National Institute of Health defines choosy, selective eating (also known as picky eating) as the unwillingness to try new foods or to eat familiar foods, as well as having strong food preferences. Choosy eating is common for many young children as they grow and assert their independence. The choosy eating phase usually occurs in young children around 2 to 6 years old. Most of the time, it is temporary as long as you continue to offer a variety of foods often and encourage them to try new ones.

Children’s perception of taste and texture is different from adults because they have more tastebuds spread throughout their mouth, which makes them more sensitive when eating. According to the National Institute of Health, children have 30,000 tastebuds of which only one-third remain in adulthood, so eating can be an intense experience for children.

The following are ways to support children trying new foods and/or revisit familiar foods:

- ♥ **Keep portion size age appropriate.** Your child’s stomach is the size of his fist, so he cannot eat very much at one time. When the portions are too large, he will choose what he likes, skip what he is not familiar with, and may be too full to try other items.
- ♥ **Eating the same foods at mealtimes.** Children are interested in what adults are doing, so it is important to model by eating the same foods as your child during mealtimes.
- ♥ **Keep meals and snacks 2-3 hours apart.** Snacks should be small nutritious items offered until meals are served. If your child is full from snacking, he may not want to eat at meal time



or try new foods.

- ♥ **Offer a variety of foods repeatedly and in various ways.** Repeat exposure allows his tastebuds to adjust to a new food’s taste and texture. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it may take more than 10 times before a child may like a new food.

This newsletter will present information that will help you support your child’s healthy eating and suggest tips and activities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to try new foods.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child’s development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

The best way to a healthy start for your infant is through responsive feeding. This means learning your infant's cues for hunger (e.g., making sucking noises or motions) and being full (e.g., unlatching while breastfeeding), and responding appropriately to those cues. Through responsive feeding, your infant develops healthy eating behaviors that will lower the level of choosy eating as he gets older. Think of responsive feeding as "you provide, your infant decides."

When your infant is developmentally ready for solid foods, here are some tips:

- ♥ **Introduce one new food at a time** to give your infant time to accept the new food, and experience the taste and texture. This is the best time to look out for allergies.
- ♥ **Slowly add a variety of tastes and textures** when your infant maintains a consistent solid food routine. For example, start with pureed and mashed foods then slowly offer lumpy and soft finger foods and later transition to chopped food, following your infant's readiness through these transitions. Allowing your infant to explore new and a variety of tastes and textures from a range of foods supports the



development of his teeth and jaws, and builds other skills that he will need later for language development.

- ♥ **Offer him a variety of soft healthy finger foods** such as steamed vegetables or firmed tofu when your infant can pick up food with his forefinger and thumb and let him self-feed as much as possible. This will allow your infant to develop his fine muscle skills, self-help skills, and healthy eating habits
- ♥ **Hold off on sweets.** When starting a new food, introduce a single-ingredient food that contains no salt and sugar. Your infant needs nutrient-rich foods, not empty calories from sweets and high-fat food items.

Activity for Infants: *Yum, Yum, Treat*

This activity is recommended for infants who are developmentally ready, able to sit up unsupported, and grasp items with his forefinger and thumb to bring food to his mouth.

What You Need:

Food of your choice.

What to Do:

1. Use soft food like avocado and tofu or cook food until soft.
2. Encourage your child to use his fingers to eat.
3. While he is grasping the food to eat, talk with him about the texture, taste, and color. For example, "Oh, you are tasting the green broccoli." "The tofu is so soft." "The avocado is the same color as the broccoli and soft like the tofu."

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Toddlers

Toddlers are learning to understand what is around them, use words to communicate wants and needs, and practice their independence. Eating is one of the first areas where your child will try to practice this skill - learning to choose what and how much to eat. You can help him start his healthy habits and encourage eating a variety of foods by:

- ♥ **Talking about what he will be eating to prepare for what is coming.** Similar to any other activity, some children react better when they know what is coming next. For example, "Remember the broccoli you picked out from the refrigerator earlier. I am cooking it with chicken. We will have it after our story and will have it with some rice, apples, and milk."
- ♥ **Being a role model.** Model the behavior you want to see. Sit together at mealtimes without distraction and talk about pleasant topics so your toddler associates positive feelings and interactions with mealtime. For example, "I am taking a bite of the broccoli, yum. It reminds me of the garden walk that we did this morning."
- ♥ **Playing, exploring, tasting, and loving the food with him.** This is the way your toddler learns to like his food. He will most likely eat it if he has time to feel, touch, squeeze, smell, and learn about it. Allowing your toddler to play and explore with his food can help him safely experience new tastes and textures.



- ♥ **Talking about the new food.** He will be excited to try what you are eating while learning new words to describe the taste, color, texture, shape, smell, and how it tastes compared with another food that he likes. For example, "The broccoli looks like the white cauliflower that we had yesterday. They both look like a tree but their colors are different."
- ♥ **Offering your toddler the recommended portions and healthy choices,** then allowing him to decide what and how much he wants to eat. Serve a variety of healthy foods, including his favorites and some new foods. It is a normal response for your toddler to eat less at this stage because of his decrease in energy needs. Encourage him to try a bite without nagging or forcing. Forcing and bribing your toddler to eat can result in choosy eating.

Activity for Toddlers: *Produce Picker*

What You Need:

Put vegetables in the refrigerator that you want your child to pick out

What to Do:

1. Ask your child to be the produce picker to pick out the vegetables he wants to eat from your refrigerator.
2. Talk with your child about his vegetable choice (taste, color, texture) and ways that you can prepare and cook it.
3. Recall and talk about the produce picking experience with your child while you are eating together.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

Your preschooler is naturally curious and may ask questions about everything. He is becoming increasingly independent and eager to be your helper with many things. Embrace these new skills by encouraging him to ask questions and help with meals. Here are some tips that may help him get excited about meals and new foods:

- ♥ **Know the facts about the food you want him to try.** Research the food you are serving and share interesting facts with him. Food facts help your preschooler learn to take care of his body and feed his desire to learn. For example, when you offer him broccoli, tell him that it is a superfood. The shape of the broccoli looks like a tree because it has a strong super power like a tree. Its super power will help his vision to see far and clear, his bones to grow strong, and his immune system to stay healthy. Extend learning by reading more about it from non-fiction books.
- ♥ **Include your child in the planning and preparing of foods.** Share your shopping list with him and ask for his help finding the items at the store. Encourage him to touch, feel, and ask questions about the food items. Let him pick out his favorite fruits and vegetables. Gardening is a fun hands-on way to learn



about foods before it becomes a meal. He will enjoy eating food he grows and harvests. You can start with easy to grow items like herbs, tomatoes, eggplants, beans, sweet peppers, lettuce, and leafy greens in small pots.

- ♥ **Include your child in the kitchen.** Allow him to do small tasks that you are comfortable with. From taking the zucchini out of the vegetable drawer to measuring half-a-cup of milk to cracking the egg, your child will enjoy knowing and learning how the food is made and the outcome of his creation. Once he is used to helping in the kitchen, engage him in sharing his ideas of preparing and cooking food the way he likes to eat. He is more likely to want to taste what he makes.

Activity for Preschoolers: *Shopping List*

What You Need:

- Crayons/pen/pencil
- Paper
- Grocery ads (optional)

What to Do:

1. Ask your child to help you write out a shopping list
2. Give your child hints of what you are thinking of cooking.
3. Encourage your child to write or draw the items that you need.
4. If you have newspaper ads from grocery stores, use them as prompts.
5. Take the list with you on your next grocery shopping trip and have him help look for the items.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Strengthen coordination of small muscles in movement with eyes, hands, and fingers
- ♥ Learn to use his senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to work with others
- ♥ Sharing and describing feelings with words

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skill and vocabulary
- ♥ Connect verbal & written words to pictures & actual objects



Cognitive Development

- ♥ Recognize math concepts like numbers, sizes, shapes, sequences, volume, measurement, and time
- ♥ Develop his creativity and imagination

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Apple Sandwiches

Adapted from: <https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/apple-sandwiches>

Ingredients:

- 1 medium apple
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter or any nut butters of your choice
- 1 tablespoon raisins or any dried fruits of your choice

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Have your child watch as you cut the apple in half from the stem down and lay each half cut-side down on a cutting board. Slice each half into 6 half-round slices and cut out the core. Have him count the slices.
3. Have your child spread peanut butter on one side of each apple slice.
4. Have your child put 4 to 6 raisins on top of the peanut butter on one apple slice.
5. Top with another apple slice, peanut-butter side down. Squeeze gently.
6. Continue with remaining apple slices.
7. Enjoy together!



Resources

MyPlate

<https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>

MyPlate shares nutrition information for healthy eating, healthy choices, and balanced meals.

HealthyChildren.Org

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/default.aspx>

The nutrition tab of this website provides nutrition facts of food we eat, simple healthy recipes, and FAQs on food questions.

CDC Good Nutrition Starts Early

<https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/nutrition-month/index.html>

This section of the CDC site has a lot of nutrition information from drink and food choices to meal patterns.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

Kai Goes to the Farmers Market in Hawai'i by Catherine Toth Fox and Mariko Merritt

Kai is hungry, but the fridge is bare. Kai and mom walk to the farmers market where they find all kinds of local produce.

The Toddler Cookbook by Annabel Karmel

This cookbook is for parents and older toddlers to enjoy together. Complete with easy recipes for a wide variety of dishes, from lettuce wraps to crunchy chicken dippers. It contains multiple opportunities for children to lend parents a hand as they whip up new flavors. This is a fun way to spend quality time together and encourage your toddler to try new foods and skills.

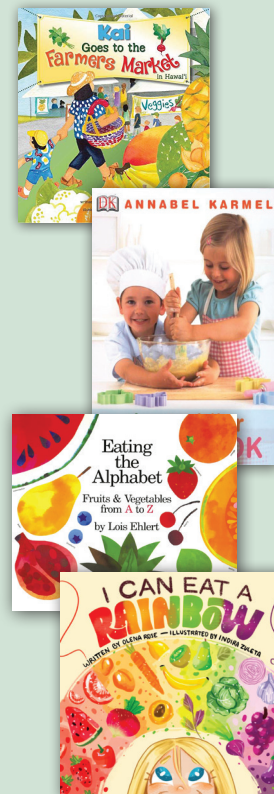
Preschoolers

Eating the Alphabet by Lois Ehlert

An introduction to fruits and vegetables of different origins beginning with each letter of the alphabet.

I Can Eat the Rainbow by Olena Rosa and Indrira Zuleta

This book shares the importance of incorporating fruits and vegetables into their diet. This colorful book will keep children engaged and entertained along the way, complete with a rainbow of fruits and vegetables of their own to color!



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii