

# FOOD CHAINING

## What is Food Chaining?

'Food Chaining' is a technique that is designed to expand upon the variety of foods in a child's diet by using small incremental steps to 'chain' one food to another.

## Picky Eaters vs Problem Feeders:

### Picky Eaters

- Eat less than 30 foods
- Foods tasted and tried but then temporarily dismissed by the child can usually be reintroduced successfully after a two week period
- Tolerates new foods on plate and usually can touch or taste a new food (even if reluctantly)
- Eats at least one item from all texture food groups
- Will add new foods to repertoire in 15-25 steps

### Problem Feeders

- Eats less than 20 foods
- Foods dismissed are never successfully re-introduced
- Cries and falls apart when presented with a new food
- Refuses entire categories of food textures
- Adds new foods in more than 25 steps

## Change is possible !

## The 'Adapt Eating Hierarchy' – Toomey et al (2005)

- See
- Smell
- Touch
- Teeth
- Taste
- Accepts foods into diet rotation

## Strategies

- Make food fun!
- Remove the pressure of eating by playing games with food (funny faces on a plate, finding objects hidden in bowls of food etc.) and involving children in food preparation and cooking wherever possible – *without* the expectation for them to eat!!
- Complete all food related activities away from usual mealtimes and usual dining table etc. wherever possible – by doing this you allow the child to enjoy the experience or looking, touching and smelling without thinking that they are expected to eat. If a child decides to

bring food to their lip or tongue, allow them to do so, do not force the child to take a bite, the fact that curiosity is growing is a step in the right direction, pushing too hard now could see the child go back a step.

- Food scrap books / diaries – cut and stick different types of food into a scrap book – again encouraging children to look at food without the pressure of eating it.
- Offer praise and reward for small steps forward
- Remember even the pickiest eater is entitled to not like some types of food! Model a language that we can use to communicate about our food, including facial expressions, vocalisations, and spoken language (“I don’t like this” with emphasised expression of distaste). This will help a child recognise that their opinions are valid and that they do not have to like everything.
- Tasting bowls are a very good way to introduce new foods to children without the pressure of serving a whole portion at mealtimes. Tasting bowls can be left around the room, and should contain bite sized pieces of new foods (that are the next step in the chaining process)
- Remember that food chains cannot be completely mapped out in advance, because the final route will ultimately depend upon how your child responds to each one of the chains.
- Sometimes foods need to be presented up to 20-30 times before it becomes part of a child’s diet. Don’t give up!

## Food Chaining Introduction

- McDonald’s French fries > different sizes of McDonald’s French fries > Different brand French fries > Homemade French fries > other food items in the same shape > Sweet potato fries > potato wedges > Baked potato > Mashed potato

### **NOTE:**

Children often feel safe with particular looks, textures or smells of food. It is often their way of protecting themselves from being overwhelmed from the sensory properties of food. Therefore we need to find foods that are similar in their sensory properties.

Try to offer tiny changes in environment, or bowls / utensils, shape, colour, texture, food group, taste etc. It may take many times of consistently introducing the same food before you see any progress – keep trying and do not give up!

Offer choices and get your child involved in deciding what food they could try next. Offer praise and reward for touching, smelling, licking and tasting new foods! Reward charts work particularly well for this and can be a visual reminder to the child in relation to their progress and success! Keep a diary of foods tasted and ask the child to cut out pictures and stick them in to remind them of the foods that they have successfully tasted.

**Be patient, don’t push too hard, and good luck!**

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