



VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

Help your child to like them



A guide for parents of young children

Vegetables and fruit: help your child to like them

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HabEat Project (<http://www.habeat.eu/>)

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HabEat Project has brought together researchers from 11 groups, from 6 European countries. It has applied a multidisciplinary approach to investigate how key food habits are formed in infants and young children (from 0 to 6 years old). It has also investigated different strategies which may be useful in changing unhealthy food habits that are already present. A combination of epidemiological studies, based on existing human cohorts from 4 countries, and experimental work conducted in 6 countries has been carried out.

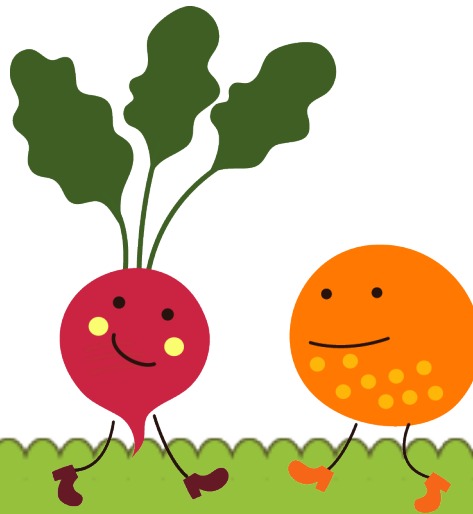
This booklet is based on the main findings of this project and evidence from the previous literature.

For more information please visit our website: <http://www.habeat.eu/>.



VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

Help your child to like them



... promoting acceptance by variety, repetition and persistence!

VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

Why help your child to like them?

Good reasons to like vegetables and fruit:

- They add colour, texture and a variety of flavours to meals.
- They are high in vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- They are low in energy and can be eaten in place of energy-dense foods that may lead to overconsumption and weight gain in children.
- They promote a healthy growth and development, and protect against long-term diseases.

Babies are born with an innate liking for sweet tastes and a dislike for sour or bitter ones. That means that they will accept foods with a sweet taste, like milk, more easily than vegetables and some fruit. So, you need to **train their taste** to accept vegetables and fruit which can be bitter or sour.

When you start to give your baby foods other than milk, vegetables and fruit are excellent first foods.



VEGETABLES AND FRUIT AS FIRST FOODS

It is easier to introduce new vegetables and fruit into your baby's diet at the beginning of the complementary feeding period (weaning) than when they are older. Children older than 2 years are likely to reject unknown foods. The complementary feeding period is a 'window of opportunity' where a baby is open to accept a variety of foods with different textures and flavours.

Promoting vegetables and fruit as part of usual eating early in your infant's life encourages them to eat a balanced diet. This is important because eating habits learned in childhood are likely to continue through life.



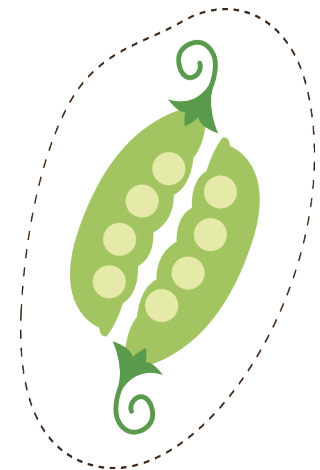
BREASTFEEDING

Help your baby to accept a variety of foods



Breastfeeding can help your baby to accept vegetables and fruit and a variety of foods more easily.

Breastfeeding benefits the health of both mother and baby and ideally should be continued beyond the introduction of complementary foods. Among its many advantages, breast milk carries flavours from a mother's diet, which may encourage later acceptance of a variety of foods by babies.



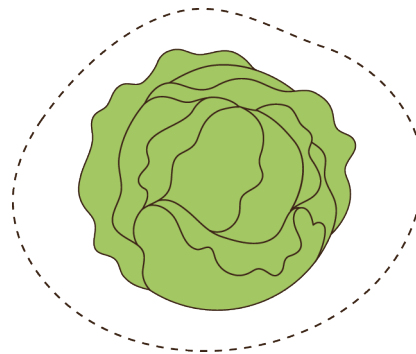
FORMULA FEEDING

How can you increase your baby's acceptance of foods?

Sometimes breastfeeding is not possible.

In this case, infant formula is a safe and healthy alternative to breast milk and, if used, should be continued until at least 12 months of age. It is important not to use cows' milk to replace breast milk or formula until your baby is at least 12 months old because cow's milk does not have the right balance of nutrients for your baby.

If your baby is formula fed, it is even more important to **introduce a variety of vegetables and fruit** at the start of complementary feeding.



FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

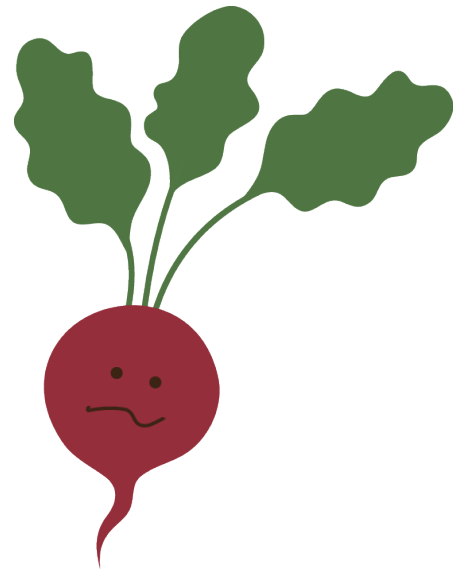
Should you keep offering a new flavour, even after a refusal?



Your baby will probably make some odd facial expressions when trying a new taste for the first time. This does not necessarily mean babies don't like it. Sometimes, this reaction happens simply because they are surprised by the unfamiliar taste.

Babies are born with an innate liking for sweet tastes and need to learn to like sour or bitter ones. To help your baby to learn, offer the new flavour again at a later time.

Facial expressions of dislike or surprise probably mean that your baby is discovering a new taste.



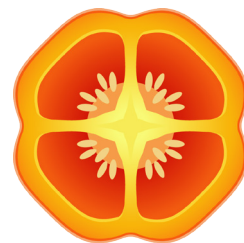
FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

Should you persist?

Try to feed your baby a variety of vegetables providing different flavours from day to day. Offer small quantities at first as only very small amounts will be eaten. **Increase the quantity gradually** and let your baby decide how much to eat.

Don't give up after only 3 to 5 tries. If your baby does not accept a new food, **offer it on at least 8 occasions** several days apart before deciding that your baby does not like it. You could try offering this food again after a few months.

Giving babies tiny tastes of vegetables as their first foods encourages long-lasting liking for these nutritious foods.



DO NOT USE PRESSURE

The number of times you will need to offer a vegetable or a fruit will vary from one child to another. Older children are often slower to accept new tastes and some vegetables and fruit are more difficult to learn to like than others.

If your baby refuses the food 3 times without the spoon touching their lips stop offering it on that occasion and try again in a few days.



You will need to be **persistent** and **patient** but do not pressure your child!

FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

Should you mask a vegetable's flavour?



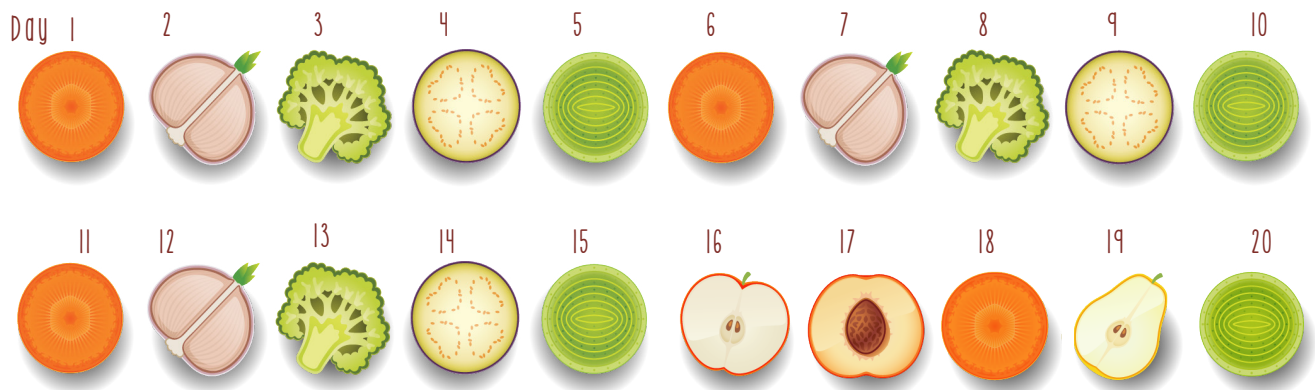
Offering a familiar liked flavour together with a novel vegetable to enhance its acceptance is a common approach. However, it is not necessary to do this. Offering the plain vegetable on several occasions will nearly always be enough to increase acceptance.

In older children, from about 2 years of age, it may take more repetitions (10 or more) before the child accepts the vegetable.

FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

Should you offer a vegetable at every meal?

When your baby is ready to begin complementary feeding, offer a tiny taste of a vegetable puree once a day, try a different vegetable every day for 5 days and then go back to the first again. Continue with vegetables for 2 weeks or so, and then try introducing some fruit and other foods. Naturally, your baby's main source of food will be milk for a while yet.



Soon your baby will be ready for 2 meals a day that include solid foods, so you could offer a vegetable and/or fruit at each meal. You should offer mashed rather than pureed vegetables or fruit from 6-7 months onwards.

FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

Encouraging variety!

Give your child a wide variety of vegetables and fruit in the early stages of complementary feeding:

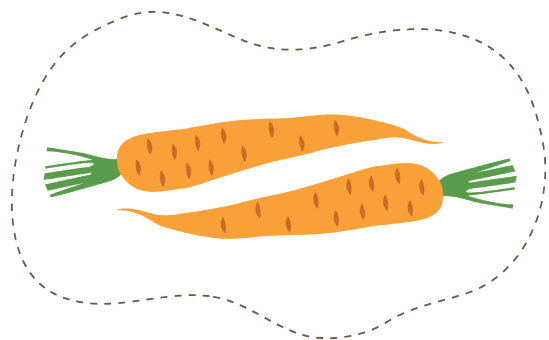


- It leads to a greater dietary acceptance immediately and years later.
- It increases the chances of a well-balanced diet.
- A variety of vegetables and fruit as first foods decreases the number of times they need to be tasted to become accepted.
- Your child is less likely to become bored by eating the same foods all the time.

FIRST FOODS EXPERIENCE

Increasing the acceptance of textures

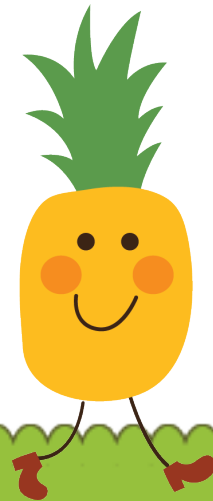
By around **7-8 months** old start giving finger foods so that your baby can hold them themselves. This will help them to learn about foods and to learn to chew foods. Soft cooked pieces of vegetables and slices of soft fruit work well as first finger foods. Gradually, your baby will learn to eat more solid lumpier foods in larger portions and will learn to feed themselves.



Allow your child to hold a soft cooked piece of the vegetable to become familiar with it.

VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

Help your child to like them



... creating good conditions to improve acceptance, as
your child grows

LEARN BY EXAMPLE

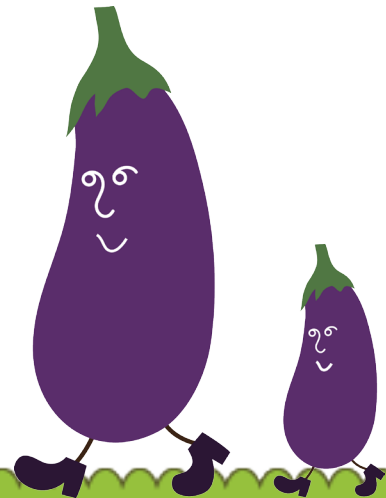
You are your child's first and most important role model!



You are the **food provider** for your family. You can set a **good example**, by eating vegetables and fruit yourself.

What you eat plays an important role in determining what your child eats. It is important for you and your whole family to follow a healthy diet.

How children react to foods varies from one child to another but is always influenced by parent's choice and attitude!



LEARN BY EXAMPLE

You are your child's first and most important role model!

If you do not like a particular vegetable use this as a good opportunity to learn to like it. When you offer it to your child try some yourself. Perhaps **after a few tries you will begin to like it**. Then you can include it as one of the vegetables you regularly provide for your family, promoting a more varied diet.

Do not assume that your child (18 months to 6 years old) really does not like a food until you have offered it 10 or more times. It helps if you **eat with your child** as often as possible and you could use those occasions to encourage your child's liking by telling your child how much you like eating vegetables.

Don't forget that actions speak louder than words
and your children are watching you!



A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

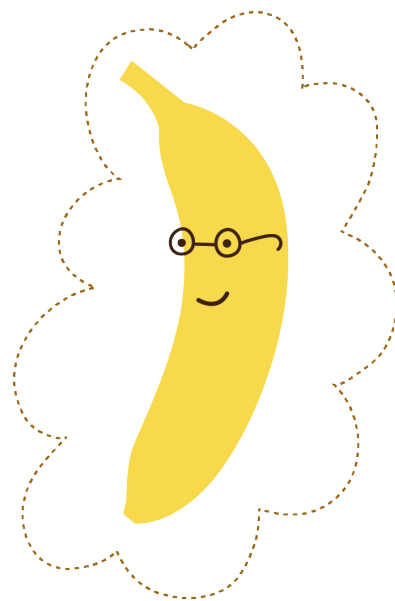
Pay attention to signs of hunger and fullness

Offer your child **small portions of foods** with the opportunity to have more and do not insist that they clear their plate. Allow your child to say when they have had enough.

Offer foods to your child **in response to their feelings of hunger**, and do not use foods as a reward for good behaviour. Do not use pressure or bribery to try to make your child eat.

Sometimes your child may be thirsty rather than hungry so you could offer a drink of water.

Focus on signs of hunger and fullness to help your child develop a healthy relationship with food.



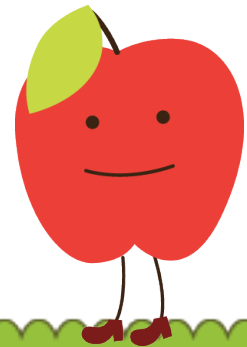
A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Foods to use for snacks

It is normal for some children to need a small snack between meals. **Snacks for children based on vegetables and fruit** prepared in finger sized portions are healthy and nutritious.

Some snack foods are high in fat, salt and/or sugar. The label on the food should tell you about the amounts of these, which the food contains. Examples of foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar are biscuits, chocolates, sweets, cakes, potato crisps and corn chips. These foods are high in energy (calories) and contain very few of the vitamins and minerals your child needs and will not help you to provide a balanced diet.

Vegetables or fruit can be offered as a nutritious healthy snack; most children find them tasty.



SNACKS OUTSIDE THE MEAL TIME

It is better not to offer foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar just before a meal as they may dull your child's appetite for your planned nutritious meals. Vegetables could be offered if your child is really hungry and cannot wait for the meal.



If children are allowed free access to foods high in fat, salt and/or sugar they are very likely to eat them, even after a meal when they are not hungry, as they are very palatable. This has been shown to favour overeating.

VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

Encourage consumption whenever you can!

Make vegetables and fruit **easily available and accessible**, as this is a good way of increasing children's intake. Always plan to provide a vegetable or fruit (or both) as part of your child's meals.

If possible, offer two different vegetables to your child during a meal, giving them the opportunity to choose to eat one or both. Try also different ways of preparing the vegetables, e.g. cooked or raw, cooked in a different way or cut into different shapes.

If you prepare a snack for your child to eat during the school day, try to include vegetables (e.g. cherry tomatoes or carrot sticks).

Try to offer a choice of vegetables to your child, when possible. This could help increase their total vegetables intake.



VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

How can you keep the cost down?

Use vegetables and fruit in all their forms; here are some tips:

- Buy vegetables and fruit in season and those on special offer.
- Turn surplus vegetables into soup and use surplus fruit in cooked preparations such as puddings or fruit purées.
- Buy frozen or tinned vegetables; these contain good amounts of vitamins and minerals, and can be stored easily, so can add variety to your family meals at short notice. Choose the ones without added salt or sugar.



ENCOURAGE CONTACT WITH FOODS

Be creative!

Activities that encourage contact with foods can help a children to become more familiar with them. If possible, try to involve them in preparing meals and you will see that they will be more interested in eating what they have created. Try the following ideas to get them involved:

- Cut vegetables and fruit into different shapes.
- Arrange vegetables and fruit into faces or other shapes on the plate.
- Let them tear leafy vegetables for salads and sandwiches.
- Let children grow their own vegetables and fruit in the garden or on the balcony or windowsill.



Activities that encourage contact with foods can lead to a better acceptance.

EATING DIFFICULTIES

Food rejection

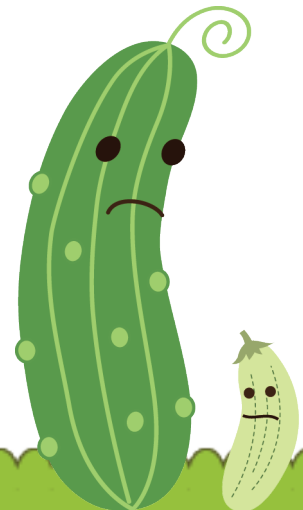


Many children go through a phase where they are unwilling to try new foods and may reject foods they have happily eaten before. This often happens at around **2 years of age**. Try not to worry because most children grow out of this.

It is best to offer your child the usual meals from the rest of the family during this time. Be patient, and maintain a pleasant eating atmosphere; it is likely that they will gradually start to accept the family meals. Don't forget to prepare healthy meals!

You do not need to pressure your child to eat a particular food - a balanced diet can be made up from a combination of different foods. However if your child's eating does begin to worry you then it is best to speak to a health professional about it.

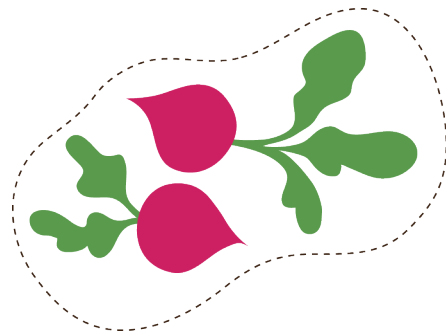
Be patient and calm if your child rejects a food. Continue to offer it as part of family meals and offer your child a taste of it from time to time.



Main messages...

In the first year:

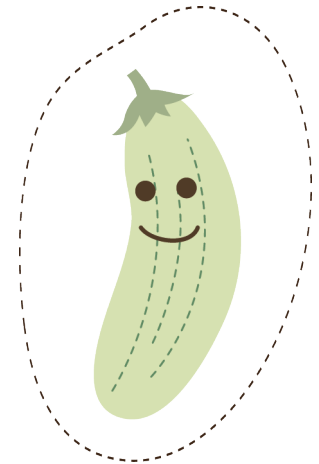
- Offering your child a **variety** of flavours and textures from the start of complementary feeding is the best way to help them to enjoy a variety of foods as they grow up.
- Offering the same vegetable or fruit on several occasions (through **repetition**) will increase their later acceptance, even if they were rejected at first.
- **Persistence** will help your baby to learn to like vegetables and fruit.



Main messages...

As your child grows...

- Continue to **provide vegetables and fruit** at meal times and use them as snack foods.
- **Set a good example** by eating yourself the foods that your child should learn to like.
- **Pay attention** to your **child's feelings of hunger and fullness**.
- **Do not give your child free access** to foods high in salt, fat and/or sugar.
- Encourage your child to have **hands-on contact with vegetables and fruit**.





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Help your child to like them

Consortium:



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