What makes food popular?

We grow to like foods that are well known to us - but we hate things that have been forced on us. At mealtimes, young kids learn to like what they see you and the rest of the family enjoying, so it is very helpful to eat together when you can. If you eat healthily, then so will the kids... eventually.

Make food look tempting and use fun games to encourage kids to try new foods, so they have a chance to get to like them.

Without fuss, serve the same family foods time and again - perhaps 20 times, but don't insist on it being eaten. Eventually kids will think that food is normal.

Remember:

- If food appears often it will become popular
- Choose lots of different foods not just safe favourites
- Keep less healthy food and fizzy drinks for special occasions
- Avoid forcing kids to finish everything on their plate if it makes them eat more than they want

And finally...
Being healthy means being active too.
Find more information at
www.nhs.uk/Change4Life

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What's on the menu?

Lots of parents worry that kids will turn up their noses at healthy food. But kids get used to anything if it keeps appearing. Tell kids what is for tea and try a regular weekly menu to get kids used to ordinary food on weekdays. Kids don’t miss favourite foods if they are not expecting them, especially if they know they will appear on treat days. Treats are more special if not served very often. Keep them for special times.

Why not try:
- Monday: a pasta dish
- Tuesday: a rice meal
- Wednesday: boiled, mash or jacket potato with a filling
- Thursday: pasta with a different sauce
- Friday: treat day - or time for something unusual?

What about pitta bread or wraps with cold meat and salad or stir-fried veg?

Simple steps to healthier eating

Choose lots of different foods, including at least five portions of different fruit and vegetables every day, so that all the essential nutrients will appear somewhere.

- Offer fruit and veg raw, steamed, boiled, roasted, tinned or stir-fried. There's no need for added salt or sugar.
- A 'portion' fits in your hand, so little hands mean little portions.
- Serve ready made processed foods less often - no more than once a week.
- Dairy foods are great for giving kids the calcium and protein they need for growing.
- Try and get all the family to eat the same food, so kids can learn to enjoy what you eat and to lessen cooking hassle.
- Serve unsweetened breakfast cereal during the week to avoid a ‘sweet tooth’.
- Discourage fizzy sugary drinks - save them for parties.

Enough’s enough!

It is just as important to know when to stop eating as it is to choose healthy foods. Forcing food never helps - in fact making kids clear their plate means they learn to eat to please their parents and to ignore their own sense of feeling full. This puts people at risk of obesity as they grow older.

- Do encourage kids to try new foods but always let them stop eating when they have had enough.
- Ask children how much they want on their plate. It is better to take a small amount with a chance of seconds if still hungry.
- Kids need practice in choosing the right amount, with help from you.
- Suggest smaller portion sizes of less healthy foods rather than banning them.
- Remind kids to save a bit of room for pudding, if on offer.