

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR LITTLE ONE TO EAT A VARIED DIET

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A collection of white line-art icons on a pink background. The icons include an apple, a five-pointed star, a crescent moon, a flower, and a carrot.

A varied diet helps provide the range of essential nutrients your child needs during weaning.

In this article we will think about why variety really is the spice of life and talk through some simple steps to help you encourage your little one to expand their food horizons.

All babies are born with a natural liking for sweet foods. This is a built-in system to protect them from dangerous foods which would have often been bitter, plus sweeter foods are also higher in calories to provide the energy needed for growth. However, too much of these foods are not good for dental health and increase the risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.

In the early stages of weaning you have the chance to help set your little one's taste buds and food preferences for life. Weaning is when taste buds and food preferences begin to develop, and therefore when a wide variety of food intake is so important. Giving your baby as many tastes of as many different foods as possible will broaden their palate and it will help them to become a more adventurous (and less fussy) eater as they grow. The For Aisha range contains a selection of exotic ingredients that can help introduce new flavours to your child's diet.

You can then continue cooking similar adventurous meals at home. Your little one therefore needs to have a good range of foods, flavours and textures in their diet for healthy development.



HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE YOUR LITTLE ONE TO HAVE A VARIED DIET THAT PROVIDES FOR ALL THEIR NUTRITIONAL NEEDS?

Here are some top tips:

START EARLY

The shaping of your baby's tastebuds start even before they are born! What you eat whilst you are pregnant and breastfeeding can have a large impact on their taste development - they experience new flavours; just by you eating a varied diet.

Consuming a varied diet of fruit, veggies, spices, highly flavoured foods, wholegrains and proteins will expose your baby to a range of tastes in the womb. It provides them with the opportunity to like exciting flavours before birth so they'll be more willing to accept them during weaning.

LET THEM BE MESSY

Babies wean using all their senses - they like to see colours, feel, smell and taste foods. Providing a whole array of items for meal times, gives them the chance to explore textures and tastes. Weaning is the perfect messy play!

BE CONSISTENT

If your little one pulls a face or refuses a food, that doesn't mean they don't like it. It's a very normal first reaction to the taste and aroma of new foods - so do persist and keep offering it. It will be worth it when they're gulping down healthy meals.

You could also try foods cooked in different ways - for example roasted vegetables, a vegetable curry and raw vegetables.

OFFER A RAINBOW OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Giving a rainbow of vegetables over the week can help your baby explore a variety of tastes and it will also provide them with the necessary nutrients for healthy growth and development. This is a great practice to continue through childhood and can make eating vegetables fun.

Eating different colours ensures you get a range of antioxidants into your little one's diet; for example, the beta carotene from carrots and the lutein from green peppers both aid eye health. The lycopene in tomatoes is an antioxidant that is good for heart health. These small nutrients are powerful ones that help protect the body from disease and infections.

FOCUS ON A BALANCED PLATE

Focusing on the balance in meals can help ensure that your little one gets all the nutrients they need. The energy needs of little ones are higher than adults, as they grow so fast! Ensure they have a range of protein, healthy fats, carbohydrates plus fruit and vegetables across their day. Meal planning over a week can help you plan ways to bring variety into the meal you create for your baby. It also makes logging what they eat easier if you wish to monitor progress.

INCLUDE THESE FOOD GROUPS IN YOUR LITTLE ONE'S MEALS ALONG WITH FRUIT AND VEGGIES

Carbohydrates	Dairy/calcium foods	Protein	Fat
Bread, rice, pasta, cous cous, bulgur wheat, quinoa, wraps, pitta bread, rice cakes, crackers, potato	Milk, plant-based milk (check it has calcium added in), yoghurt, cheese, tofu, green vegetables (broccoli, kale, cabbage, okra), soy beans, almonds, chia and sesame seeds, tahini	Meat, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans and pulses, yoghurt, cheese and milk	Avocado, oily fish (salmon, mackerel, trout), nut butters, ground nuts, linseeds, chia seeds, olives, coconut, cheese, full fat dairy,

IN SUMMARY

Eating a varied diet throughout pregnancy, whilst breastfeeding and right from the first steps of weaning will help your child get the range of tastes, nutrients and textures that are important for their physical health and sensory development. If you can, be persistent and make mealtimes fun.

The For Aisha range offers some unique meals that can help you expand your little ones palate. For recipe ideas, please visit foraisha.com/recipes



Visit us at foraisha.com    /cookingforaisha

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