

## Tips for Transitioning Kids to Healthier Foods

Many young children are picky eaters and prefer to eat simple, familiar foods. However, childhood is an important time that shapes food preferences and lifelong health habits. As an early care and education provider, you have the unique opportunity to introduce children to a variety of nutritious foods to make sure they grow up strong and healthy. While you may encounter small challenges along the way, the tips below for transitioning kids to healthier foods are sure to make the task less daunting.

- Transition foods after a summer, winter or spring break. Children are less likely to notice a difference if they've been away for awhile.
  - Transition to new foods or ingredients slowly and gradually. Instead of going directly from whole milk to fat-free, first serve 2% for a few weeks, then 1% (low-fat), before finally arriving at fat-free milk. You can also try mixing whole and fat-free and gradually reducing the amount of whole milk as kids adjust to the taste.
  - Be sure to introduce only one new food at a time and allow kids to adjust to the change.
  - Encourage all kids to taste food every time it's served, but let them know that they don't have to eat a whole serving if they don't like it. They can just "try it." Make it a group event.
  - Introduce new foods in fun and creative ways. For example, freeze small batches of mixed chopped fruit in small cups or ice cube trays, add a stick, and voilà – a delicious frozen treat that kids are sure to enjoy!
- Involve children in preparing meals and snacks created from new foods they are learning about. Children are more likely to try and enjoy food that they have helped prepare.
  - Teach children where the food they're eating comes from. This may be comforting for picky eaters and allows them to learn about how food is made or grown. Talk about the food with children during mealtime, and encourage them to share how they like it.
  - Always provide plenty of praise and encouragement when kids try new foods to reinforce this positive behavior. Praising children at the table who are trying the new food may encourage the more hesitant children as well.
  - "Sneak in" healthier ingredients. For example, cauliflower can go undetected when pureed and mixed in with mashed potatoes. As kids adjust to the taste, you can serve cauliflower on its own.

