

A gentle guide for cautious eaters

Tiny Steps to New Foods

20 ready-made food chains, simple scripts, and printable trackers to help your child explore new foods without pressure.

Made for families with children about 2 to 8

Start with one tiny step tonight

A note before you begin

For every parent who's tired of the dinner battle.

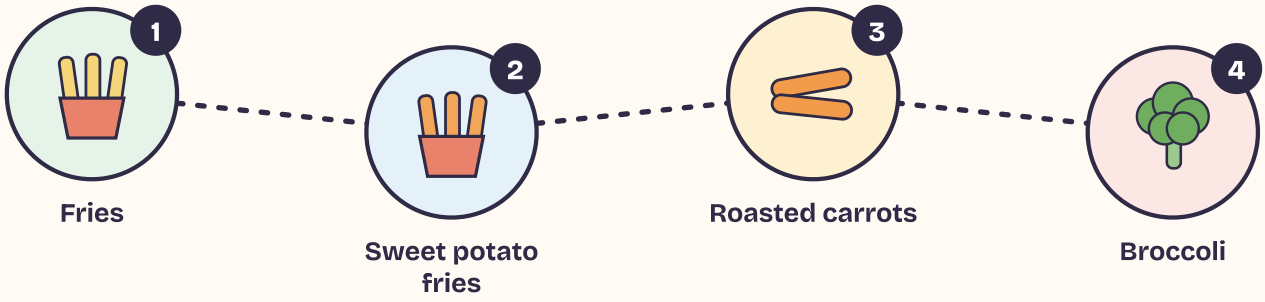
If dinner at your house has become a nightly negotiation, or you've made the same five foods for months because they're the only things your child will eat, you're not alone, and you're not doing anything wrong.

Picky eating is one of the most common worries parents bring to pediatricians. For most children, it's a normal developmental phase. For some, it lasts longer and needs a more deliberate approach.

This book uses a method called food chaining. Instead of asking your child to leap from chicken nuggets to grilled salmon, you build a chain of tiny, almost unnoticeable steps from the foods they already eat to the foods you'd like them to eat.

It's slow, gentle, and designed to work with your child's need for familiarity rather than against it.

No battles. No bribes. Just small steps, repeated.



What the research says

Picky eating is one of the most studied topics in child nutrition. Here's what the evidence shows.

What the research says

27.6% at age 3

of children were picky eaters in a study of 4,018 children, dropping to 13.2% by age 6. Almost two-thirds of early picky eaters grew out of it within three years.

Cardona Cano and colleagues, International Journal of Eating Disorders, 2015

What the research says

Repeated exposure

Repeated, low-pressure exposure can increase acceptance. Some studies see gains after 8 or more offers, but there is no magic number for every child.

Nekitsing and colleagues, 2018; USDA NESR evidence review

What the research says

Pressure backfires

In an experiment, preschoolers ate significantly more when they weren't pressured to eat, and made far fewer negative comments about the food.

Galloway and colleagues, Appetite, 2006

What the research says

Exposure beats rewards

In a two-week study, simply offering children tastes of a disliked vegetable increased liking and intake. Adding rewards didn't make a significant difference.

Wardle and colleagues, European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2003

What this means for you

Most picky eating improves with time. You can help it along with many small, low-pressure tastes, which is exactly what food chaining provides, while avoiding the pressure that makes it worse.

What's inside

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Twenty ready-made chains.

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Food list, patterns, chain planner, and trackers.

Popular chains

1 Chicken nuggets to chicken tacos

2 French fries to roasted vegetables

3 Plain pasta to pasta with vegetables

4 Cheese crackers to bean quesadillas

5 Apple slices to new fruits

6 Yogurt tubes to green smoothies

7 Pancakes to veggie fritters

8 Grilled cheese to spinach quesadilla

Part 1 5-min read

The steps to eating

For a cautious eater, eating a new food isn't one step. It's a ladder. Feeding therapists often describe a progression like this, and every rung counts as progress.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tolerates it nearby	Looks at it	Touches it	Smells it	Licks or kisses it	Bites and spits	Chews and swallows

Celebrate small wins

Touching a new food, or letting it sit on their plate, is real progress. Praise the bravery, not the eating.

What the research says

Not only tasting counts

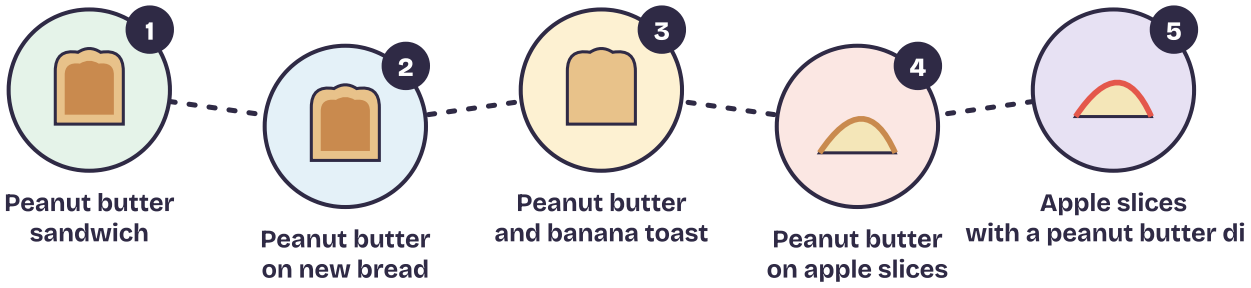
Studies have found that non-taste sensory exposure, like looking at, touching, and smelling vegetables, can increase children's willingness to taste them.

Research on multisensory exposure, including the VeggieSense study, University of Reading

Ready-made chains, continued

Peanut butter sandwich to apple and peanut butter

Uses a familiar spread as a bridge to banana and apple, with age-appropriate preparation.



Safety: use a thin spread of nut or seed butter, not a spoonful. Soften or thinly slice hard apple for young children, account for allergies, and supervise eating.

Banana to zucchini muffins

Keeps a familiar banana flavor while the child knowingly explores zucchini in a baked format.

