

How to Use the Food Chaining Map to Get Your Child to Eat More Variety

We want our children to enjoy eating what the rest of the family eats, and we have to start with foods a child already enjoys. We also want to turn a child's "processed foods" and "sugars" into "whole foods" in the as soon as we can. The "Chaining Map" helps us plan *how* to do this. We will gradually change one sensory characteristic of their favorite foods getting them to accept more variety until they eventually eat the same foods as the rest of the family.

NEVER try to "sneak" a new food into a child's diet by masquerading it in one of their favorites, or you run the risk of having them completely stop eating that food.

Favorite Foods – Look at the "Nutritional Quality" ratings of the foods your child enjoys. If your child has lots of 1's and 2's start by writing those foods in the first column. If one of those foods provides the only source of protein or fat in a child's diet, you will need to avoid working with that food until the child is accepting three or more other proteins and fats. Whenever we modify a child's foods we run the risk of having them completely refuse that food. Proteins and fats provide essential nutrients. They are "lifeline" foods. Make sure your child has "lifeline" foods in their repertoire.

Alternatives 1 - Visuals

Many children only eat specific brands. Eating "brand name" foods gives your child a way to control consistency in the sensory components of a food. "Brand name" foods are easy to recognize. You may not be able to tell the difference between chicken nuggets from *McDonalds* or *Burger King's* or between pureed carrots from *Beechnut* and *Gerber*, but your child can.

If your child likes "brand specific" foods the first change you make will be to introduce other brands or other similar products from the same brand (e.g. other flavors of their favorite fish shaped cracker). Write down three similar "brands" or variations within a specific "brand".

Children sometimes find a food color that feels "safe" to them. You will need to introduce color slowly to a child on a monochromatic diet. You may need to stay with a safe color and choose a way to introduce another flavor with the same color and texture for these children (e.g. substitute mashed cauliflower for mashed potatoes). Write down three variations with a similar color and texture.

Alternatives 2 – Visuals and Flavors

Once a child accepts eating the three choices from the "Alternatives 1" column it's time to move on to more new foods. If your child was only eating from a variety of "fast food" chain brands switch to "prepared frozen and cooked at home" brands of a similar product or even "homemade". You may need to make some adjustments to shape or flavor to more closely match the accepted foods. Write down these three "new" foods.

If your child only ate a specific color – now you can mix in a little bit of a brighter food (like beets, carrots or spinach) to give their food a touch of color. Make sure they see you mix it up. Write down these three "new" foods.

Alternatives 3 – Flavors and Textures

If you have been working with the same flavor – now introduce similar flavors with different textures (homemade chicken cutlets for chicken nuggets or mashed instead of pureed)

You can also introduce a new flavor or texture as a dip on a familiar food.

Alternatives 4 – More Flavors and Textures

Make wider variations using dips, mixes and foods that have to be combined (peanut butter and jelly) or can be separated (peas and rice).