

# Taste Test Guidelines

## Why Try Taste Tests?

Current Canadian dietary guidelines state that fruits and vegetables are an important part of healthy eating habits, and eating a variety of vegetables and fruit may lower the risk of heart disease<sup>1</sup>. However, data from a nationally representative survey showed that 62-68% of Canadian children aged 9-13 do not eat enough<sup>2</sup>.

Food preferences can influence fruit and vegetable intake in children<sup>3</sup>. Increasing a child's exposure to a fruit or vegetable can increase the likelihood that they will enjoy the food<sup>4</sup>.

**FUN FACT:** Studies showed that exposing a child to an unfamiliar vegetable for up to **8 sessions led to increased liking**<sup>5</sup>. Repeated exposure led to increased liking of a previously disliked vegetable<sup>6</sup>. Taste-testing sessions can be **an effective health promotion strategy to increase fruit and vegetable preference and intake.**

**It's also a lot of fun to see the reactions kids have toward new foods!**

## Key Points for a Taste Test

**1. Make sure to teach proper tasting etiquette.** All students should try the food. If they dislike the food, they should quietly either swallow what is in their mouth, or spit the rest in a tissue and throw it away. Discourage rude sounds or gestures like *EEEWWWs* and *YUCKs*. This can ruin the experience for students who may like the food but are now scared to admit it.

**2. Teach the students about the food.** Show them what it looks like in whole form if they are tasting cut up pieces. Tell them which part of the world the food came from. Give them some nutritional information, *i.e.*, *carrots are good for your eyes because they have beta-carotene*. Suggest ways that they can eat the food: cooked raw, sliced, in healthy desserts, etc. Invite them to guess which food group this item is from.

**Pro Tip:** *A lot of this extra information is provided on each taste test sheet.*

**3. Invite students to use their senses.** Let them touch and see the food before they eat it. Ask students to describe the physical properties of the food including texture, color and physical appearance. Have them smell it and ask them what they think about how it tastes once they try it.

**4. Give each student an *I Tried It* card to take home to parents.** Find a template on the taste testing resource page, and add interesting information about the food, which you can find on each taste testing sheet. The most important thing about the cards is the portion where students fill in how much they liked it. If the kids tried broccoli at school and loved it, then the parents can provide it more often.

**5. Have fun with it!** There is no one set way to offer taste testing. Some schools combine the taste testing with their snack shack. Some have a facilitator go to each class and walk them through the process. Some go outside at recess and have the students try the food there.

## Do you Need Parent/Guardian Permission?

Yes. Discuss parental permission with your administrators, as it may vary in each school. Some schools offer snack programs and the taste testing could be blanketed under the same activity. Some schools will require a signed consent form for each taste test session, and some schools will need one consent form for the entire year. You must have permission before serving children any food. They may have allergies or cultural reasons for limiting certain foods.

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## References

1. Government of Canada. *Eat Vegetables and Fruit*. 2019. (<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/make-it-a-habit-to-eat-vegetables-fruit-whole-grains-and-protein-foods/eat-vegetables-and-fruits/>)
2. Garriguet D. Overview of Canadians' Eating Habits. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. July 2006.
3. Rasmussen M, Krolner R, Klepp K, Lytle L, Brug J, Bere E, Due P. Determinants of fruit and vegetable consumption among children and adolescents: a review of the literature. Part 1: quantitative studies. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2006;3:22.
4. Cooke L. The importance of exposure for healthy eating in childhood: a review. *J Hum Nutr Diet*. 2007;20(4):294-301.
5. Wardle J, Herrera ML, Cooke L, Gibson EL. Modifying children's food preferences: the effects of exposure and reward on acceptance of an unfamiliar vegetable. *Eur J Clin Nutr*. 2003;57(2):341-348.
6. Wardle J, Cooke LJ, Gibson EL, Sapochnik M, Sheiham A, Lawson M. Increasing children's acceptance of vegetables; a randomized trial of parent-led exposure. *Appetite*. 2003b;40(2):155-162.