



Good Food, Good Life

Eating Experiences in Childhood Can Affect Acceptance of New, Healthy Foods

Lausanne, SWITZERLAND 18 February 2008 – In studies scientists at the Nestlé Research Center in Lausanne, Switzerland, explore effective ways to increase the acceptance of new, healthy foods by infants. This work provides insights into building a strong foundation for long-term healthy eating habits.

Nestlé researchers performed a two-part study examining the effects of introducing a variety of vegetables early in weaning to infants six to 12 months of age. Infants from different European cultures (France and Germany) were offered vegetables for nine consecutive days. One group was given one vegetable (no changes) all nine days, while a second group was presented with three different vegetables changed every third day (low changes) and a third group was given three different vegetables changed daily (high changes). The infants' reactions to the new vegetables were quantified by the amount eaten and with liking ratings given by the mother and a neutral observer.

Results indicated that daily exposure to a new food significantly increased acceptance of all new vegetables. Additionally, the frequency of vegetable change (high changes) was more effective in increasing acceptance than the number of vegetables offered (low changes).

Subsequent to the vegetable variety trials, a second study with seven-month old infants was conducted to measure the effects of repeated exposure of an initially-disliked vegetable. Prior to the study, mothers of the infants reported stopping the presentation of a new food after two or three rejections by the infant. However, Nestlé researchers proved that after 7-8 exposures to an initially-rejected food, more than 70% of infants showed both acceptance and liking of the food. Even nine months post-intervention, 63% of mothers reported that their infants still regularly ate the initially-disliked food.

These studies strongly suggest that early experiences with food can impact food choice and preference, and that parents should actively encourage their children to try new foods. The frequency of the introduction to a new food is also an essential element to facilitate its acceptance. Parents should offer a food about 6-8 times to promote the acceptance of healthy foods.

"Infants and children may initially dislike certain vegetables, but parents shouldn't give up on introducing these foods. By consistently encouraging children to eat healthy foods, they can learn to eat and enjoy them," said Dr. Andrea Maier, Nestlé scientist leading the studies.

Research from Nestlé provides the foundation for science-based nutrition recommendations to help parents promote healthy eating habits to their children.



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