

# Research shows how to banish children's fussy eating

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Parents could banish their children's fussy eating habits by following

three simple steps, a new study suggests.

Introducing the 'three Rs' – Repetition, Role Modelling and Rewards - at meal times could help parents to get their [children](#) to eat, and even like, new vegetables, according to new research from Aston and Loughborough Universities.

By repeatedly exposing a child to a certain food ('repetition'), eating it first and show them how tasty it is ('role modelling') and praising them for trying it ('rewards'), a parent can help positively change their child's attitude to the food.

The study found that introducing the 'three Rs' dramatically increased children's liking and consumption of vegetables that they previously disliked.

Dr Claire Farrow, of the Aston Research Centre for Child Health, said: "Not eating enough fruits and vegetables is one of the main risk factors for global mortality. Eating more fruits and vegetables could prevent numerous cancers, stroke, diabetes and obesity. Children in the UK, however, do not eat enough of them – with only about 20% of them achieving the recommended five-a-day.

"It can be very challenging for families to encourage their children to eat a healthy, balanced diet as children naturally go through stages during their toddler years when they are often fussy and will refuse new foods, particularly vegetables. This is a normal developmental stage for children, but it can often lead to a restricted diet as children become fussier and fussier about what they will not eat. Families need evidence-based scientific advice about what they can do to help encourage children to taste, and eventually like, new or disliked fruits and vegetables.

"Our research shows that a combination of repeatedly exposing children to vegetables, rewarding them for trying the food and modelling enjoying eating the vegetable yourself, can help to encourage children to taste and eventually like vegetables which they did not previously like eating. Eating behaviours have been shown to track throughout childhood and into adulthood – so it is vitally important that children are exposed to [fruits and vegetables](#) early in life to inform healthy eating as they grow into adolescence and adulthood."

A total of 115 children aged between two and four took part in the research. They were placed in four separate groups and given the same vegetable to taste every day for 14 days. Each group was exposed to a different combination of 'food intervention' techniques – repeated exposure; role modelling and repeated exposure; rewards and repeated exposure or the 'three Rs': role modelling, repeated exposure and rewards. The amount of vegetable consumed by each child was measured at study's conclusion.

All of the children were presented with the vegetables by their parents in their homes. Interventions in school-based settings have been researched previously, with encouraging results. However, school interventions often require whole school sign-up and local government funding. As such, they are unavailable to most families.

At the end of the study, the group of children introduced to the 'three Rs' or 'two Rs' (rewards and repeated exposure) showed significant increases in the amount of vegetable they would eat and in their liking for the previously disliked vegetable. Children exposed to the 'three R's' ate an average of 4g of the vegetable, compared to 0.6g before the start of the investigation.

A recent survey conducted by the BBC found that half of all children in the UK aged between seven and 12 do not [eat](#) fruit or [vegetables](#) every

day. Almost a quarter of children surveyed said that they ate sweets or chocolates on a daily basis.

**More information:** "'Why don't you try it again?' A comparison of parent led, home based interventions aimed at increasing children's consumption of a disliked vegetable," *Appetite*, Volume 87, 1 April 2015, Pages 215-222, ISSN 0195-6663, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.12.216](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.12.216)

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