Food Chaining

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What is food chaining?

Food Chaining is a child-friendly treatment approach that helps introduce new foods while building on the child’s past successful eating experiences.

In this process, the child is presented with new foods that may be similar in taste, temperature, or texture to foods the child already likes and accepts. These similar foods are used to create the “food chains” or links between the foods a child already accepts and the new, targeted foods that we would like the child to eat.

Main goal?

To expand the diet and have children eat food, not necessarily all foods, but food from all food groups and ones that they enjoy.

“Enjoyment is one of our biggest goals.”

Cheri Fraker  CCP/SLP, CLC
Food Chaining Techniques

1. **Flavor Mapping** involves analyzing the child’s preferences and looking for patterns between the child’s favorite foods including flavor, texture, and color.

2. **Transitional Foods** involves using favorite foods in between bites of new food to encourage the child to eat while also helping to mask after taste of the newly introduced food.

3. **Flavor Masking** involves finding flavors accepted by the child that can be used on a variety of newer food items. Masking increases approval of new foods by allowing the child to experience a known accepted taste paired with the new food item. Masks are designed to be phased out as the child tolerates the targeted food items. (Example: Ranch Dressing, Mrs. Dash seasoning, cinnamon).

**Example of Food Chaining**

- McDonald’s French Fries
- Different sizes
- Different brands
- Homemade French Fries
- Other food items in same shape
- Breaded vegetables like zucchini
- Sweet potato fries
- Tater tots
- Potato wedges
- Baked potato
- Mashed potato

**Practicing at Home**

Food chaining methods that have been established by the Food School team, specific to your child, should be reinforced at home.

Practicing other skills introduced at food school (ie. mouse bites, elephant bites, kissing foods, and licking foods) at the dinner table will also promote the progress of your child.

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“Once I put food in front of them, it belongs to them. I don’t try to force them, and I never say, ‘Take a bite.’ I model, and I let them feel that control and trust because that is absolutely key. I have expectations for them, and they know that, but I don’t let it become a battle. I always try to leave on a success.”

- Cheri Fraker CCP/SLP, CLC
Feeding Tips

Introduce only 1 or 2 new foods at a time!
This will decrease the chances of your child feeling overwhelmed as new foods are added.

Use the skills developed at food school!
Your child must be able to tolerate being in the same room with the food, the sight of the food, aroma of the food, the feel of the food on their hand, and finally the taste of the food by licking and then biting/chewing the food.

Something old something new! When introducing new foods, give your child choices, including foods they are familiar with.

Don’t give up on a food!
Some foods may be more difficult than others (ie. meats or vegetables); you should consistently try the same variation of a food item for several meals/days before moving on (i.e. 15–25 times).

Try modifying unsuccessful foods! If a food has been consistently rejected, consider whether you can modify it. Keep in mind, adults can look at a food and predict how it will taste and feel in their mouths, but children cannot—they may accept the modified food more!

Keep chaining on! Once an item is accepted, continue to gradually change accepted items in the chaining format.
Plan meal themes!
Planning themes is a big part of food chaining. Themes can include:
- Events (ie. baseball park foods)
- Travel destinations (ie.China, Italy, Hawaii ect.– talk about the destination during the meal!)
- Colors of foods or drinks (ie, orange: sweet potatoes, orange juice, chicken tenders, orange bell peppers)
- Textures (ie. crunchy)
- Flavors (ie. fresh, sweet, spicy, tart)

Bring joy to the table!
In so many of kids, there's no joy in eating because it is too hard. Building confidence and enjoyment at the table can help children become healthy eaters for life.

More Tips?
- Not every meal has to be part of the food chaining process!
- Announce times of meals and snacks to give your child warning to when its time to eat.
- Keep distraction and noise to a minimum during meals
- Make sure your child is positioned comfortably to enjoy their meal
- Shift the focus off your child at meal times as much as possible- this will encourage normalcy around them eating
**RECIPE: Zucchini Pancakes**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 3 cups shredded zucchini (about 2 medium-sized zucchini)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 2/3 cups whole-wheat flour
- 3/4 cups crumbled feta cheese
- 4 scallions, greens and whites, chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Put the shredded zucchini in the colander and sprinkle with the salt. Set the colander in the bowl.
2. Using your hand, press down on the zucchini so that as much liquid as possible drains out into the bowl. Stir the zucchini and repeat. Throw away the liquid.
3. Put the zucchini in the bowl and add the eggs, flour, cheese, and scallions. Mix well.
4. Put the skillet on the stove and turn the heat to medium. When the skillet is hot (flick some water on—it should dance and evaporate immediately), add the oil.
5. Using the tablespoon, scoop blobs of the zucchini mixture from the bowl and spread it into a round, flat nest on the skillet: it should make a circle that’s about 2 inches wide and 1/4 inch thick. Repeat to fill the skillet.
6. Cook until the bottoms are deeply golden, about 5 minutes, then turn the pancakes over and cook 5 more minutes. Repeat with the remaining mixture.

Source: chopchop.com