

# Children's dietary guidelines need to change, experts say

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Dietary and infant feeding guidelines should be strengthened to include more practical advice on the best ways to support children to learn to like and eat vegetables, say nutrition and dietetics researchers from the Flinders University Caring Futures Institute.

With the Australian Health Survey showing only 6% of [children](#) aged 2-17 years are eating the recommended amount of veggies, experts say more tailored practical advice is needed on how to offer vegetables to young children through repeated exposure and daily variety in order to increase their intake.

A recent paper co-authored by researchers from Caring Futures Institute and CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, suggests that up to 10 or more exposures to a particular [vegetable](#) when the child is between the age of 6 months and five years can lead to greater chances of them liking vegetables and eating more of them.

While the [strategy](#) of repeatedly exposing young

children to vegetables to assist flavor familiarity and ultimately intake is not new science, there is a gap between evidence and dietary advice.

"There is an opportunity to improve children's vegetable intake by including practical advice—the 'how to' in our recommendations to parents and caregivers," says Flinders Caring Futures Institute Deputy Director and co-lead author of the paper Professor Rebecca Golley.

Prof Golley says [food preferences](#) are established within a child's first five years of life. Therefore, it's crucial to establish healthy eating behaviors early to support growth, development, and dietary habits.

"We know that a lack of vegetable consumption across the lifespan has effects on health, including an increased risk of chronic diseases, obesity and being overweight," she says.

"That is why getting children to like a variety of vegetables such as green beans, peas, carrots and even Brussel sprouts from an early age is so important.

"Early eating behaviors are impressionable and babies and young children can be supported to try different foods and to learn to like them."

The paper, Supporting strategies for enhancing vegetable liking in the early years of life: an Umbrella review of systematic reviews' is an output of the five-year VegKIT project, funded by Hort Innovation and undertaken by a consortium led by CSIRO, including Flinders University and Nutrition Australia Victoria Division.

An umbrella review was undertaken on the diverse body of existing international research around sensory and behavioral strategies that support children to like certain foods including vegetables.

The project examined 11 systemic reviews to

determine the effectiveness of strategies including repeated exposure and variety of vegetables, for which promising evidence was found.

Emerging evidence was found for other strategies such as offering vegetables as a first food (not fruit), using non-food rewards to encourage the eating of veggies and reading children vegetable-based story books.

The report also highlights that foundations for vegetable liking can even be laid before a child is born.

"It appears that the maternal diet also plays a part through exposure to vegetable flavors in-utero and increasing children's chances of liking and eating them later, and the same goes for the mothers' diet while breastfeeding," Professor Golley says.

However, she says these strategies must be backed by more research if they are to be underpinning advice for parents, health professionals and policymakers.

**More information:** Lucinda K Bell et al, Supporting strategies for enhancing vegetable liking in the early years of life: an umbrella review of systematic reviews, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqaa384](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa384)

Provided by Flinders University

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