



## "Exposure to food's non-taste sensory properties: A nursery intervention to increase children's willingness to eat fruit and vegetables."

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Exposure to the non-taste sensory properties of food has become an increasingly popular approach used by nurseries to increase toddlers' willingness to consume healthy food. This approach is based on the assumption that familiarity with the sight, smell and feel of food will reduce neophobia towards that food. However, the efficacy of such interventions has not yet been formally evaluated. This study introduced a series of sense-based activities involving fruit and vegetables to 55 children aged 12-36 months in their nursery environment and assessed the impact of these activities on their willingness to taste the foods compared to a control group (N=37). The activities included: looking at the shape, size and colour of the food when it was cut open; touching, squeezing, stroking, and smelling the food when it was cooked; singing a song about the food; and hearing a story about the food. The children who had taken part in these sense-based activities in a play setting tasted significantly more of the vegetables they had been exposed to than a control group in a mealtime context. While children who had taken part in activities involving figs were significantly more likely to taste this fruit, the intervention had no impact on children's willingness to consume fruit overall. These results suggest that activities that expose children to the non-taste sensory properties of food might assist in encouraging higher levels of vegetable consumption. However, further research is needed to explore whether the programme's effects persist in the longer-term, and to identify which component of these interventions has the greatest impact. These findings would inform the development of a more efficient and effective series of sensory activities to enhance vegetable consumption in young children.

*Ella's Kitchen believes that, whilst there are simple ways to show your toddler what vegetables look, smell and feel like, sound can be trickier. Tasty Tunes has been created to help parents use sound to make healthy eating fun.*

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