



Tips for Taste Tests

A taste test — or better yet, a series of taste tests — can be a great way for students to experience foods they see every day but never try, or to try new, nutritious foods. Taste tests can also help reinforce the nutritious eating messages you are promoting as part of Fuel Up to Play 60.

Below are some tips and advice for conducting your taste tests. These ideas come from the Action for Healthy Kids program called [Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge](#).

Think about the long-term impact of your taste tests.

If your goal is to help students improve their eating habits, you need to plan for long-term success. If your taste tests are a hit, students will want the foods they liked to be available. Work with your school nutrition manager to think creatively about how you can make the new nutritious foods part of your ongoing meal service or snack offerings.

Get input from students.

Let students vote thumbs up or down on the item being taste tested. Provide green (up) and red (down) paper squares students can place in a bowl to indicate their decision on the sample foods. After the taste test, tally the votes and share the results. If you're taste testing more than one food, have students use different colored slips of paper to rank their preferences.

Let teachers taste test, too!

Invite school faculty and staff to taste test foods. Let them know how the taste test supports your school's wellness policy and practices. Ask them to encourage students to participate in the taste tests.

Taste test a variety of foods.

At minimum, you'll want to give students a chance to sample (at least once) foods from each of the five food groups — milk (including low-fat and fat-free milk, cheese and yogurt), fruits, vegetables, grains (including whole grains) and lean meat and beans. Ideally, you'll give students a number of chances to try lots of different foods.

Serve good-sized samples — and make sure you have plenty to go around.

Make sure you have plenty of the new, good-sized sample foods on hand. For example, sampling three ounces of a new beverage is better than tasting only one ounce. This will give students a real sense of what the food or drink is like. As another example, a quarter of a sandwich is better than just one bite.

Offer taste tests in a way that makes sense for your school.

For example, you could have a special table inside the cafeteria . . . or put the taste test samples on a cart and "go mobile" . . . or put a special table just outside the cafeteria or in another hallway where large numbers of students travel throughout the day . . . or conduct taste tests at times other than the scheduled lunch period.

Make the taste tests fun and inviting.

In addition to making your food samples tasty and appealing, think creatively about other ways to make the taste-test experience fun. For example, you could play music, place signs and posters throughout school, use balloons, ask the servers to wear costumes or give away gifts and prizes.

Reinforce messages about making nutritious food choices.

Take advantage of the taste tests as a time to communicate why the featured foods are nutritious choices. Use table tents with nutritional messages, put up posters or distribute stickers or other promotional items with key messages.

Play it safe.

Make sure anyone involved with preparing and serving food at your taste tests meets your school's food safety standards. Work with your school nutrition manager to ensure safe practices.