

Running head: NOVEL FRUIT INTRODUCTION

Predicting successful introduction of novel fruit to preschool children

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## Predicting successful introduction of novel fruit to preschool children

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### Abstract

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Background: Few children eat sufficient fruits and vegetables despite their established

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health benefits. The feeding practices used by parents when introducing novel foods to

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their children, and their efficacy, require further investigation. Objective: The current

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study aimed to: 1) establish which feeding strategies parents commonly use when

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introducing a novel fruit (NF) to their preschoolers; 2) assess the effectiveness of these

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feeding strategies on children's willingness to try a NF. Design: Correlational design.

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Participants and Setting: 25 parents and their 2-4 year old children attended our

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laboratory and consumed a standardized lunch, including a novel fruit. Interactions

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between parent and child were recorded and coded. Statistical analyses performed:

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Pearson's correlations and multiple linear regression analyses. Results: The frequency

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with which children swallowed and enjoyed the NF, and the frequency of taste exposures

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to the NF during the meal, were positively correlated with parental use of physical

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prompting and rewarding/bargaining. Earlier introduction of solids was related to higher

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frequency of child acceptance behaviours. The child's age at introduction of solids and

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the number of physical prompts displayed by parents significantly predicted the

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frequency of swallowing and enjoying the NF. Age of introduction to solids and parental

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use of rewards/bargaining significantly predicted the frequency of taste exposures.

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Conclusion: Prompting the child to eat and using rewards or bargains, during a positive

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mealtime interaction, can help to overcome barriers to novel fruit consumption. Early

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introduction of solids is also associated with greater willingness to consume a NF.

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## Predicting successful introduction of novel fruit to preschool children

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Food preferences developed during childhood are stable and enduring, influencing food choices in adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Many parents find it difficult to introduce fruits and vegetables (FV) successfully into their children's diets. Only 21.5% of 5-15-year-olds in England consume the recommended five or more portions of FV a day.<sup>2</sup> In the US, under 25% of 6-11 year olds eat the minimum recommended number of daily FV servings.<sup>3</sup> FV are essential to a healthy diet, playing a role in preventing chronic cardiovascular disease and protecting children from some types of cancer in adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

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Whilst a number of factors intrinsic to the child, such as neophobia or sensory sensitivity, play an important role in children's consumption of FV<sup>5,6</sup> these are not readily modified by public health interventions. In contrast, potentially modifiable extrinsic factors, such as exposure to flavours through breastmilk,<sup>7,8</sup> and age at weaning<sup>9,10,11</sup> affect food acceptance. In particular, babies who are introduced to solids relatively early show greatest acceptance of foods later in childhood, whereas those weaned onto solids after 9 months show greatest feeding problems.<sup>10,11</sup> Furthermore, those infants who are both breastfed and introduced to a wide variety of vegetables early in weaning show greatest acceptance foods later in infancy,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that introducing solids early within the period recommended by health professionals may confer advantage for later feeding. Finally, some parental feeding practices,<sup>12</sup> may also affect FV consumption, and have great potential to be manipulated in interventions. However, we know very little about the type of feeding practices commonly used by parents when introducing novel foods to

46 their children in early childhood, and we know even less about their relative  
47 effectiveness.

48 One primary predictor of children's eating behaviour is not what, but how parents feed  
49 their children.<sup>13</sup> Pressure is commonly used by parents of preschool children in both  
50 novel and familiar food consumption interactions<sup>14</sup> but the effectiveness of this strategy  
51 for facilitating FV intake is equivocal. Pressure to eat has been negatively associated with  
52 children's FV consumption and preference.<sup>12,15,16,17,18</sup> However, it is likely that a degree  
53 of pressure or prompting is necessary to encourage children to taste novel foods, leading  
54 to the exposure necessary to facilitate novel food acceptance,<sup>19</sup> and there is some  
55 evidence that certain pressurising behaviours and encouragement to consume FV predict  
56 a greater intake of FV.<sup>20,21</sup> Furthermore, the use of tangible rewards for eating has yielded  
57 mixed evidence. Some findings suggest that giving children food rewards for eating a  
58 target food will lead to the devaluation of the target food, while increasing the liking for  
59 the reward food.<sup>22</sup> Other evidence suggests that rewards do not decrease liking and are an  
60 effective means to increase short-term consumption of foods.<sup>23,24</sup> Finally, observing  
61 others, particularly parents or trusted adults, eating novel or less well liked foods, has  
62 been shown to facilitate children's consumption of that food.<sup>25,26</sup>

63 There has been little work which observes parents interacting with their children  
64 whilst introducing novel foods, with much of the work in the field relying upon  
65 retrospective self reports. The current observational study therefore aimed to establish  
66 which feeding strategies parents commonly use when trying to introduce a novel fruit  
67 (NF) to their 2-4-year-old children, and also to assess the relative effectiveness of these  
68 feeding strategies on children's willingness to try a NF. We selected novel fruits as our

69 target novel food because we wanted a target food that children would be neither  
70 enthusiastic nor very reluctant to try. Given that fruits are relatively well accepted but still  
71 present some challenge for parents, and are also easy to find novel versions of, we chose  
72 to test our hypotheses with this target food. We hypothesized that pressure to try the NF  
73 and reward for trying the NF would be related to the frequency of children's acceptance  
74 and rejection behaviours towards the NF. Furthermore, we hypothesized that parental  
75 feeding strategies aimed at increasing children's familiarity with the NF, such as teaching  
76 about the NF and comparison of the NF to familiar foods, would be associated with a  
77 higher frequency of NF acceptance, and a lower frequency of NF rejection behaviours.  
78 We also hypothesized that role-play, parental modeling, and early introduction of solids  
79 would be positively correlated with NF consumption. Finally, we developed models to  
80 assess the best predictors of 'successful' NF introductions and the frequency of NF taste  
81 exposures during the mealtime.

## 82 Method

### 83 *Participants*

84 Twenty-five parent-child dyads were recruited through the Infant and Child  
85 Laboratory database, which contains information on families in which parents have  
86 indicated an interest in research participation at the University of Birmingham, UK.  
87 Ninety-eight parents were contacted and the response rate was 35.7%. The parents who  
88 participated in this study were the primary caregivers of their children; where fathers  
89 participated (n=2) these were primary or equal caregivers. Inclusion criteria were that the  
90 child was in the age range 2-4 years and that the family spoke English sufficiently well to  
91 complete the questionnaire measures and to converse in English during the mealtime

92 interaction. Exclusion criteria for children included known food allergies or disorders  
93 affecting eating, current or recent major illness or diagnosed intellectual disabilities, or  
94 familiarity with all 3 novel fruits used in the study. Of the 35 parents who expressed  
95 willingness to participate, five parents could not participate due to their availability at  
96 times of testing, three parents did not attend, and two children had to be excluded due to  
97 food allergies. Pre-screening questions determined whether children had eaten all of the  
98 lunch foods and any of the three NFs (Date, Physalis or Sharon fruit) before. The  
99 demographic characteristics of the final sample can be seen in **Table 1**. Overall,  
100 participants had high socio-economic backgrounds, were predominantly white British and  
101 had a healthy weight, and introduced their infants to solid food at a mean age of 5.27  
102 months (range 3-6 months). During 9 of the 25 sessions, one sibling was present. All  
103 information pertaining to interactions between the parent and the sibling were excluded  
104 from the data analysis.

105

106 Table 1 about here

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### 108 *Materials and Procedure*

109 The Ethical Review Committee of the University of Birmingham approved this study and  
110 all parents provided informed signed consent prior to participation.

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112 Parents and children were welcomed into our child friendly laboratory where each  
113 received a standardised lunch. Parents were told we were interested in the types of  
114 strategies parents use to encourage their children to try new foods, and were told to do

115 what they would normally do to encourage their child to try the novel food. All lunch  
116 items were weighed prior to and after consumption. Depending on the parents' pre-  
117 indicated preference, the children's lunch consisted of half a ham or cheese sandwich  
118 made with white bread (approximately 120kcal or 125kcal respectively, J. Sainsbury  
119 Plc.), 10g ready salted potato crisps (approximately 53kcal, Walkers Snack Food Ltd.),  
120 two chocolate-chip cookies (approximately 114 kcal, Burtons Foods Ltd.), five milk-  
121 chocolate buttons (approximately 35kcal, Cadbury Plc.) and five green grapes  
122 (approximately 18kcal). These foods are the standard offered within our laboratory for  
123 studies of this kind, and were selected to reflect typical familiar and palatable foods  
124 offered to UK children for lunch. Mothers received a lunch identical to that of their child,  
125 except that they were given a whole ham or cheese sandwich depending on their pre-  
126 indicated preference (approximately 240kcal or 250kcal respectively, J. Sainsbury Plc.).  
127 A whole date (approximately 23kcal), a physalis fruit with the leaf (approximately 2kcal),  
128 or a quarter of a sharon fruit (approximately 3kcal) were presented as NFs, on the same  
129 plate as the rest of the lunch. These fruits were selected as they have unusual  
130 characteristics and are novel to most children within the described age range in the UK.  
131 We checked with the parent prior to the study that the specific fruit used was novel for  
132 that individual child. Dates are eaten dried, resembling very large raisins with dark brown  
133 wrinkled texture. A physalis resembles an orange cherry tomato and has a papery leaf  
134 which surrounds it. Sharon fruits are orange/yellow, seedless, resemble the shape of a  
135 tomato and have a texture similar to apple. Due to the seasonal nature of sharon fruit, it  
136 was only used in three of the 25 lunch sessions. Dates were used in 13 lunch sessions and  
137 physalis used in 9 lunch sessions, the slight imbalance in frequency being due to

138 children's prior exposure: if a child had previously consumed a date, a physalis was used,  
139 and vice versa. The lunch sessions were recorded using two unobstrusive, remotely  
140 adjustable cameras located in two opposite corners of the observation room which  
141 ensured that the mother's and child's faces could be recorded at the same time. The  
142 participants were left to consume the lunch foods alone.

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144 After the parent indicated that the meal was finished, they completed a set of  
145 questionnaires, providing demographic details and early feeding history. Parents provided  
146 information on their age, ethnicity, household income and level of education. Parents also  
147 reported their child's age and gender. Children and parents were measured and weighed  
148 by a trained researcher. Parents provided information on whether or not the child had  
149 been breastfed, the duration of breastfeeding, as well as the age at which it was stopped,  
150 if applicable, and the child's age at introduction of solid foods.

151

152 *Analysis*

153 *Video Analysis.* An adaptation of the Family Mealtime Coding Scale (FMCS<sup>27</sup>) was  
154 used to code the parental feeding strategies observed during the lunch sessions. Parental  
155 feeding strategies were grouped into seven categories: teaching about the NF, verbal  
156 pressure, physical prompts to encourage consumption, rewarding/bargaining, comparison  
157 of the novel NF to other foods, role-play and modeling (including comments, facial  
158 expressions and verbalizations). Detailed descriptions and corresponding examples for  
159 each category of strategies within the video-coding schedule can be seen in **Table 2**.  
160 Additional codes and definitions were added to the FMCS for any variables that we



161 wished to code but that were not present in the original coding scheme (including  
162 modeling, role play, comparison, teaching). Children's behaviours towards the NF were  
163 grouped into nine categories; physical refusal: e.g. turning head away from offered NF  
164 (1), verbal refusal e.g. 'I don't want it' (2), touched/held but refused e.g. picks up the NF  
165 but refused to taste (3), smelled but refused to taste (4), licked but refused to take a bite  
166 (5), smelled and licked but refused to take a bite (6), held in mouth but refused to  
167 swallow (7), swallowed but refused further or expressed dislike (8) and swallowed and  
168 enjoyed, defined as the child's consumption of some, or the entire NF without a negative  
169 reaction (9). Higher category scores therefore indicated greater exposure to and/or  
170 willingness to try the NF. We assessed the frequency with which these behaviours were  
171 displayed. NF consumption was defined as any occurrence of the child biting off,  
172 chewing and swallowing bits of the NF, regardless of whether this was enjoyed or  
173 whether further consumption of it was refused. Finally, we calculated the frequency of  
174 any taste exposure to the novel fruit during the meal based on the sum of frequency of  
175 categories 5-9 above. The time at the beginning and the end of the session as well as the  
176 time at the introduction and consumption (if applicable) of the NF, were also noted. The  
177 introduction of the NF was defined as any comment made by the mother or the child  
178 regarding it. All mealtimes were coded by a single observer (CB). A proportion (25%) of  
179 the videos were coded by a second coder (JB). The average intra-class correlation was  
180  $r=.87$  (range .78-.94) indicating very good inter-rater reliability.

181

182 Table 2 about here

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184 *Statistical Analysis.* Stem-and-leaf plots were inspected and indicated that the majority  
185 of data were normally distributed; parametric tests were therefore conducted on all  
186 variables. Initially, one-way ANOVAs were carried out to ensure that parental feeding  
187 strategies and the frequencies of children's behaviours towards the NF did not differ  
188 based on child and parent gender or their weight categories. Differences in parent and  
189 child behaviours based on breastfeeding history, the presence of a sibling and the types of  
190 NFs were also assessed using one-way ANOVAs. Partial Pearson's correlation  
191 coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between parental feeding  
192 strategies and the frequencies of children's behaviours towards the NF. Two tailed  
193 analyses were conducted to test our non-directional hypotheses concerning the  
194 relationships between verbal pressure, physical prompting, and rewarding/bargaining  
195 with children's acceptance of the NF. All other correlational analyses were one tailed in  
196 line with our directional hypotheses for the remaining relationships. All correlational  
197 analyses controlled for the influence of annual income and duration of mealtime. Finally,  
198 two multiple linear regression analyses were carried out to predict: 1) the frequency of  
199 swallowing and enjoying the NF and 2) the total frequency of taste exposure to the NF  
200 during the mealtime. Predictor variables were entered if they were significantly correlated  
201 with the dependent variable in the preliminary analyses. Age of introduction to solids,  
202 annual income and duration of mealtime were also entered as covariates. Age of  
203 introduction to solids was added as a covariate in the frequency of exposure analyses  
204 despite the fact that the correlation between age of introduction to solids and frequency of  
205 taste exposures was approaching significance rather than statistically significant, because  
206 of the research evidence which strongly links age of introduction to solids and later food

207 acceptance.<sup>7-10</sup> Significant predictors were chosen on the basis of backward elimination.  
208 This method of regression was chosen as it is suited to exploratory research, and because  
209 backward elimination is less likely to be affected by suppressor effects.<sup>28</sup> A priori power  
210 calculations were not possible because of a lack of similar literature upon which to base  
211 effect sizes. However, post hoc power calculations using G\*Power 3.1.2 suggested that  
212 both regressions had adequate power (0.90 and 0.92, respectively). PASW (Predictive  
213 Analytics Software version 17) was used in all analyses.

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## Results

216 *Parental feeding strategies*

217 **Table 3** displays the number of parents displaying a feeding strategy and the means  
218 and *SDs* of their frequencies. Verbal pressure was the most frequently exhibited strategy  
219 that parents engaged in, while role-play was the least frequently observed strategy.

220

221 Table 3 about here

222

223 *Differences in parental feeding strategies and child behaviour towards the NF based on*  
224 *parent, child and lunch session characteristics*

225 One-way ANOVAs indicated that feeding strategies used by parents during the lunch  
226 sessions or children's behaviours towards the NF did not differ based on child or parent  
227 gender, child or parent weight category, the child's breastfeeding history, the presence of  
228 a sibling or type of NF that was used (data not shown). Annual income was positively  
229 associated with parental modeling ( $r(25) = .60, p < .01$ ), and child smelling but refusing

230 the NF ( $r(25) = .40, p < .05$ ). As a result of these associations the effect of annual income  
231 was controlled for in all further analyses.

232

### 233 *Lunch sessions and children's behaviours towards the NF*

234 Lunch sessions lasted between 11 and 34 minutes ( $M = 20.68, SD = 6.01$ ), and the NF  
235 was introduced, by parent or child comment, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> minute ( $M = 4.13,$   
236  $SD = 5.2$ ). The time of introduction of the NF was not related to any aspect of the child's  
237 behavior towards the NF. The duration of the mealtime was related to the frequency of  
238 the children's physical ( $r=.50, p<.05$ ) and verbal ( $r=.42, p<.05$ ) refusal of the NF but was  
239 not related to any maternal behaviours or the frequency of food acceptance behaviours.  
240 Subsequent analyses were therefore adjusted for duration of mealtime. Eight of the nine  
241 predefined child behaviours towards the NF were observed during the lunch sessions;  
242 smelling and licking but refusing to bite the NF was not observed. The behaviours  
243 described are not mutually exclusive. The majority of children (80%,  $n=20$ ) showed  
244 verbal refusal of the NF at some point during the mealtime (mean frequency =3.84  
245  $SD=5.28$ ), 64% ( $n=16$ ) of children physically refused the NF during the meal (mean  
246 frequency = 2.84,  $SD=4.57$ ), 64% ( $n=16$ ) touched/held the NF but refused to eat it at  
247 some point during the meal (mean frequency =1.92,  $SD=1.61$ ), and 12% ( $n=3$ ) smelled  
248 the NF but refused to eat it, at least once (mean frequency= .12,  $SD=.33$ ).

249

250 In total, 80% ( $n=20$ ) of children had at least one taste experience with the NF,  
251 including licking the food, or holding it in the mouth but not swallowing it. Forty percent  
252 ( $n=10$ ) of children held the NF in their mouths but refused to swallow it (mean frequency  
253 =.68,  $SD=.75$ ), 12% ( $n=3$ ) of children licked the food but refused to eat it (Mean

254 frequency=.16, SD=.37) and 12% (n=3) of children swallowed the food but expressed  
255 dislike or refused to eat more (Mean frequency=.16, SD=.37). Seven children (28%)  
256 swallowed and enjoyed the NF (mean frequency =.72, SD=1.34). Five children (20%) did  
257 not taste the NF at all, including three children who touched the NF but would not taste,  
258 one who smelled it but would not taste, and one who had no interaction with the NF apart  
259 from verbal refusal of it.

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261 *Parental feeding strategies and children's behaviours towards the NF*

262

263 **Table 4** about here.

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265 **Table 4** shows that verbal pressure, physical prompts and rewarding/bargaining  
266 strategies employed by the parent were all positively associated with the frequency of  
267 physical and verbal refusal, while physical prompts and rewarding/bargaining were also  
268 positively associated with the frequency of swallowing and enjoying the NF and the  
269 frequency of taste exposures to the NF during the mealtime. Comparisons between the  
270 NF and other foods were positively associated with the frequency of verbal refusal of the  
271 NF, but also smelling and licking the NF. Teaching about the NF was positively  
272 associated with the frequency of smelling and licking the NF. Role-play was positively  
273 associated with both verbal refusal and the frequency of licking the NF. Furthermore,  
274 parental modeling behaviours correlated with the degree of verbal refusal, and the  
275 frequency with which the child smelled the NF and licked the NF.

276

277 *Early solid feeding history*

278 One-tailed partial Pearson's correlations were carried out to examine whether children

279 who had later introduction to solid foods within the recommended weaning period would  
280 show higher frequencies of food refusal and lower frequencies of food acceptance  
281 behaviours. In line with this hypothesis, the child's age at introduction of solids was  
282 negatively correlated with the frequency of a child swallowing but refusing more of the  
283 NF, as well as with the child swallowing and enjoying the NF. There were no significant  
284 associations between the age at introduction of solids and any other child behaviours  
285 towards the NF (see **Table 4**).

286

287 *Predicting swallowing and enjoying of the NF and predicting frequency of NF taste*  
288 *exposures during the mealtime*

289 Two multiple linear regressions were carried out in order to predict the frequency of the  
290 child swallowing and enjoying the NF and the frequency of NF taste exposures during the  
291 mealtime. The physical prompts applied by the parents to encourage NF consumption and  
292 rewarding/bargaining strategies were entered into both models. Age of introduction to  
293 solids, annual income and duration of mealtime were entered into the model as  
294 covariates. Significant predictors were selected through backward elimination. The  
295 results of the regression indicated that two predictors explained 49.4% of the variance in  
296 the frequency of children swallowing and enjoying the NF ( $F(2,21) = 10.24, p = .001$ ).  
297 Physical prompts ( $\beta = .56, p < .01$ ), as well as the age at which solids were introduced ( $\beta$   
298  $= -.55, p < .01$ ), significantly predicted the frequency of this behaviour. **Table 5** shows  
299 the unstandardised ( $B$ ), and standardised ( $\beta$ ) regression coefficients and their associated  
300 error, as well as the measure of explained variance ( $R^2$ ) across models.

301

302 Tables 5 & 6 about here

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304 The results of the second regression indicated that two predictors explained 51.4% of the  
305 variance in the frequency of taste exposures to the NF ( $F(3,20) = 7.05, p = .002$ ). This  
306 time, the age at which solids were introduced ( $\beta = -.39, p < .025$ ), as well as the use of  
307 rewards/bargaining ( $\beta = .55, p < .002$ ), significantly predicted the frequency of taste  
308 exposures during the mealtime. **Table 6** shows the unstandardised ( $B$ ), and standardised  
309 ( $\beta$ ) regression coefficients, their associated errors and explained variance ( $R^2$ ) for this  
310 model.

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### Discussion

314 This study aimed to assess the types of feeding strategies parents use to introduce a NF  
315 to their children and to establish the relative effectiveness of these feeding strategies on  
316 children's willingness to consume the NF. Swallowing and enjoying the NF, and the  
317 frequency of taste exposures to the NF during the meal were related to physical  
318 prompting and the use of rewards and bargaining. However, these practices were also  
319 associated with children's refusal behaviours such as physical and verbal refusal. Parental  
320 modeling and practices that were designed to educate children about the NF, such as  
321 using comparisons between the NF and other foods and teaching about the NF, were  
322 positively associated with increased exposure, such as smelling and licking (but not  
323 swallowing) the NF. Finally, as we predicted, earlier introduction of solids was related to  
324 a higher frequency of child acceptance behaviours.

325 Although parental feeding strategies during novel food introductions have previously

326 been assessed,<sup>14</sup> this is one of the first studies to assess these through observation of  
327 parent-child interaction. In line with other research,<sup>14</sup> pressuring strategies including  
328 verbal pressure and physical prompting were the most frequently and widely used feeding  
329 strategies, while rewarding/bargaining strategies were only used by around half of the  
330 parents. Where parents used greater verbal pressure and physical prompting, children  
331 more frequently refused the NF physically and verbally, while also swallowing and  
332 enjoying it more frequently if physically prompted. Similar paradoxical results have also  
333 been reported by other researchers.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that in the context of novel food  
334 introduction, these parental strategies were associated with child refusal earlier during the  
335 lunch session, and as the child became more familiar with the NF during the meal,  
336 physical prompting also became associated with consumption of the NF.

337 The observed association of physical prompting strategies with higher frequencies of  
338 child acceptance supports previous research<sup>20,21</sup> indicating that a degree of prompting  
339 may be required to initiate tasting of new foods, particularly fruits or vegetables.  
340 However, we did not measure children's liking of the NF in this study separate from  
341 consumption and the effects of prompting on liking for novel foods requires further work.  
342 Rewarding/bargaining was also associated with a higher frequency of refusal, but also  
343 acceptance behaviours. That parental use of rewards and bargains was associated with  
344 greater frequency of swallowing and enjoying the NF and NF taste exposure through the  
345 mealtime is consistent with other work which suggests that rewards are effective in the  
346 promotion of vegetable consumption in children.<sup>23,24</sup>

347 Modeling has previously been shown to be an important factor for increasing  
348 children's willingness to consume novel foods, fruits and vegetables,<sup>25,26</sup> but in our study,



349 we did not find evidence to suggest that parental modeling increased children's  
350 willingness to try the NF, although it was associated with relevant exposure through  
351 smelling and licking. Similarly, strategies to increase children's familiarity with the NF  
352 (teaching, comparison) were also used fairly frequently, by around two thirds of the  
353 parents, and were associated with some aspects of sensory exposure such as licking and  
354 smelling. Taste exposure provides the child with the sensory experience in the  
355 appropriate modality, necessary to facilitate future consumption by fostering familiarity  
356 and enabling children to learn that the NF is "safe" to eat.<sup>30</sup> This exposure to the NF  
357 through tasting rather than just seeing or holding it is crucial.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, parental use  
358 of comparison may be a useful technique because novel objects that are similar to a  
359 familiar object lead to the retrieval of knowledge about and memories relating to the  
360 familiar object and may lead to the inclusion of the NF into schemata of known and liked  
361 foods, making the consumption of the NF more likely.<sup>32</sup> However, parents should take  
362 care to compare novel foods with familiar foods that are similar and well liked by the  
363 child, to avoid activation of schema and/or the retrieval of memories relating to non-  
364 preferred foods, which may lead to the rejection of the NF.<sup>32</sup> This may explain the  
365 associations between parental use of comparison strategies and higher frequencies of  
366 verbal refusal behaviours in this study. These results indicate that parental modeling and  
367 feeding strategies that aim to increase children's familiarity with a food through exposure  
368 can be effective in encouraging children's interaction with novel fruits.

369 In line with our hypotheses, the age at which children had been introduced to solids  
370 was significantly associated with the frequency with which children swallowed the NF.  
371 Children who had been introduced to solids closer to 6 months less frequently consumed

372 the NF than children who had been introduced to solids closer to 4 months, further  
373 limiting their exposure and sensory experience of the NF within the mealtime. Our results  
374 therefore further support the suggestion that early introduction of solids into a child's  
375 diet, within the age range for weaning recommended by health professionals, during a  
376 specific sensitive period for solid food introduction,<sup>33</sup> and the child's associated exposure  
377 to a range of flavours and textures, facilitates novel food introduction.<sup>10,34</sup>

378 Together, the use of physical prompting and the early introduction of solids were  
379 strong predictors of the frequency with which children consumed and enjoyed the NF.  
380 Similarly, early introduction of solids in combination with the use of  
381 rewarding/bargaining techniques by the parent predicted children's overall frequency of  
382 taste exposure. This suggests that children who are introduced to solids earlier in life,  
383 within the recommended age range for weaning, are more accepting of novel foods<sup>10,11</sup>  
384 and, in combination with parental strategies that promote interaction with the target food,  
385 acceptance and tasting occurs more readily. It may even be the case that the taste and  
386 or/texture experience is less aversive or more pleasant for children exposed to solids  
387 earlier, thus reinforcing subsequent tasting.<sup>35</sup>

388 The current study has several limitations. Our sample was small, came from high  
389 socio-economic backgrounds and was predominantly White British and therefore the  
390 replication of our findings in a larger and more ethnically and economically diverse  
391 sample is desirable. Furthermore, although observational methods hold many advantages,  
392 the meal took place in an unfamiliar laboratory. Whilst the researcher was not physically  
393 present while parents and children consumed their lunch, the cameras through which  
394 sessions were filmed were visible and mothers were aware they were being recorded.

395 Furthermore, the study was cross-sectional and we did not assess the time sequences of  
396 behaviours between mother and child in this study. Parents' behaviour may be both the  
397 cause of, and response to, children's interactions with the NF, both in the short and longer  
398 term. It is not unlikely that children who show greater refusal elicit greater verbal  
399 pressure or greater prompting from their parents. The fruits in the study were chosen for  
400 their novelty to the participants in our sample, but importantly, we did not find fruit-  
401 specific effects in this study and therefore the effects we observed are likely to generalise  
402 to other fruit that children are not familiar with. However, the practices demonstrated by  
403 the parents in this study may be limited to introduction of novel fruits, not novel foods  
404 more generally.

405 Despite these limitations, our study provides further information on the types of  
406 feeding strategies parents commonly use, how they are related to NF acceptance and  
407 which factors are especially relevant for the successful introduction of novel fruits.  
408 Through this observational study we have provided support for previous findings that the  
409 early introduction of solids can lead to a greater willingness to consume a novel fruit and  
410 that prompting the child to eat and using rewards or bargains, during a positive mealtime  
411 interaction, can help to overcome barriers to novel fruit consumption.

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