

Getting your child to eat more vegetables



Do you sometimes struggle with your child to get him or her to eat vegetables? You are not alone. Many parents face the same challenge. Children can be picky, like to make choices for themselves, and are often afraid to try new things. Unfortunately, one of the more common things children may refuse to eat are vegetables.

Vegetables contain fibre, vitamins and minerals. Fibre can help children feel full and help them go to the bathroom regularly. Vitamins and minerals are needed to help children grow and develop.

Here are some tips to help your child eat more vegetables.



Tips for before a meal

Get involved!

Kids will be more likely to try something they have chosen or helped to make.

- Put out small bowls of different types of vegetables and let your kids make their own salads.
- Have your children help you wash, peel or chop vegetables.
- Get children to look through cookbooks or magazines for a recipe for their favourite vegetables.
- Have your kids help you make a grocery list.
- Get your kids to help choose vegetables at the grocery store. Have them pick the one they like best.
- Try choosing a new and different vegetable each week and experiment. They may find a new favourite.

Make their opinion count!

Kids love to have choices and make the decisions for themselves. Let them choose between two or three different kinds of vegetables. This lets them learn about food and shows them their opinion counts!

Making eating vegetables easy!

When your kids come in the door, hungry after school or after school activities, they will often reach for the most convenient snack. Why not make the easy choice a healthy choice? Cut up vegetables such as carrots, cucumber, cauliflower, broccoli, cherry tomatoes and bell peppers. Put them in individual re-sealable bags for a quick snack. Put these snacks in a visible place in the fridge.



Home team advantage!

Use your child's favourites to your advantage! Add vegetables to your child's favourite foods. Try adding mushrooms, bell peppers, broccoli, onions or tomatoes to your child's favourite kind of pizza.

Be sneaky

Add chopped broccoli or green peppers to spaghetti sauce, or mix grated zucchini and carrots into casseroles and soups.

During a meal

Monkey see, monkey do

Children learn by watching adults and older siblings. If you eat vegetables without a fuss and enjoy them, your children might too. This is a very easy way to encourage your kids to eat vegetables.

If you serve it, they will eat it!

Research has shown that if you serve more vegetables to your kids, they are more likely to eat more vegetables. Tuck veggies into their lunches, serve them for dinner, or keep a container of fresh veggies on hand in the fridge or snacks.

The 8th, 15th or 20th time's the charm!

Young children like foods that are familiar so they may need to be exposed to vegetables on repeated occasions before they will try them. Be patient. Research tells us that it can take many tries before a child will eat a new vegetable. If you let them stop after trying a single bite, they may be more willing to try a new vegetable, knowing that if they do not like it, they will not be forced to finish it.



Avoid the pressure cooker

Forcing your child to eat a vegetable may cause them to resist and dislike it more. Avoid pressuring them and allow them to decide how much they will eat.

If your child isn't hungry, don't force food on them. This will just make them more resistant. If they are not hungry, do not try to force them to eat. Don't make the dinner table a battlefield.

Non-food rewards

Do not reward your child for eating vegetables with a food such as a dessert. Rewarding children may send them the message that the dessert is more important than the vegetables and they may focus on the reward more than the behaviour which gets them the reward. You may occasionally serve dessert, but do not treat it as a reward for positive behaviour.

Reduce distractions

Turn the television off and put away books and toys at dinner. Focus on eating!

Stick to the plan!

Make a routine and stick with it! Try to have meals and snacks around the same time daily. Children cope best when they have a routine. If snacks are served at least an hour before dinner, your child will likely be hungry when they arrive at the dinner table and more likely to eat.

Don't make your kitchen into a restaurant!

Do not make a different meal for your child if he or she chooses not to eat the meal the rest of your family is eating. This will send the message to your child that it is okay to be picky. Seeing the same vegetables repeatedly will make them familiar and your child will be more likely to try it.



Meal ideas

Lunch ideas

Try putting something different in your child's lunch for a change!

Easy vegetable ideas include:

- Tortillas with cucumber rolled in the centre.
- Stuffed peppers (See recipe at the end of this handout).
- Baby carrots, cherry or grape tomatoes, sliced cucumbers and bell peppers are all sweet vegetables that may be eaten on their own or with dip.
- Leftover vegetables from the night before in a thermos can be tasty. Heat in the microwave in the morning and enjoy warm at lunch.

Soup

- Add frozen vegetables to homemade or canned soups.
- Add leftover fresh vegetables cut up for use with dips or in salad.
- Try adding these ingredients to your favourite soup:
 - lentil soup – celery, tomato, cauliflower or even curry
 - cream of broccoli soup – chopped broccoli or carrots
 - tomato soup – diced tomato, onion, black-eyed peas or thawed okra
 - potato soup – cooked pieces of potato and leek
 - black bean soup – canned or frozen corn, cooked pieces of red onion; green, red, yellow, orange or red pepper
 - vegetable broth – celery, onion, carrot, corn or a handful of frozen vegetables

<http://www.healthy-kid-recipes.com/vegetablerecipes.html>



Salad

- Use different types of greens as the base of your salad. Try romaine, mixed greens, baby spinach or arugula.
- Fill the salad with your child's favourite vegetables.
- Try adding fruit for a sweet twist.
- Try using a sweeter dressing such as honey and orange juice rather than a vinaigrette, as kids often prefer sweet flavours over sour flavours.

Dip

- Chop up fresh vegetables and serve them with dips like hummus, baba ghanoush (eggplant dip), salad dressings, peanut butter, guacamole or salsa.

Grill

- Try grilling vegetables on the barbecue.
- Grilling brings out sweet flavours in veggies that may not come out during regular cooking methods.
- While it is not healthy to char meat, it is perfectly safe to eat charred vegetables.
- Brush vegetables with a little bit of oil and grill.
- All vegetables work but try asparagus, zucchini, eggplant, and mushrooms for something different!

Fresh, frozen or canned

- If your child refuses canned peas (or some other vegetable), try frozen or fresh. It may simply be a texture preference.
- Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables all are equally nutritious. However, your kids may prefer the crunch of fresh vegetables.
- It is important to know that some canned vegetables have sodium in them, so rinse them off before eating them. This will remove some but not all of the sodium.



Cheese please!

- Add grated low-fat cheese to vegetables like broccoli or cauliflower but not more than twice a week.
- Try adding different spices to vegetables. Basil, thyme, pepper, parsley, or curry may encourage your child to try a vegetable.
- Allow your child to use barbecue sauce, tomato sauce, ketchup or mustard to flavour their vegetables.

Pass the pasta!

- Try adding onions, zucchini, yellow squash, mushrooms, broccoli, bell peppers, peas or even eggplant to pasta. These vegetables can easily be camouflaged with tomato sauce.
- Puree vegetables into tomato sauce for a thicker sauce. If you like, you may slowly add finely diced vegetables to the sauce each time you serve it.

Be the Mom or Dad that says “please play with your food!”

- It’s a well-known fact that kids like to play with their food. Try these fun foods with your child:
 - corn on the cob
 - stuffed mushrooms (see recipe at the end of this handout)
 - stuffed peppers (see recipe at the end of this handout)
 - vegetable kabobs
 - vegetables and dip
- Make vegetable scenes or sculptures. Cut up fresh veggies and give your kids toothpicks and allow them to make funny faces, animals or scenes. Encourage them to snack as they go and to eat their masterpiece.
- Stuff baked potatoes with salsa, broccoli, bell peppers, tomatoes or cheese.
- Have kids fill their own tacos or burritos with their favourite vegetables.



Surprise!

- Try vegetables in places you wouldn't expect, such as:
 - Sandwiches. Add bell peppers or spinach to a sandwich.
 - Pasta. Add pureed cooked cauliflower to macaroni and cheese.
 - Ground meat. Mix grated vegetables into dishes containing ground meat. Consider adding grated carrots and celery into meat loaf. Use chili to disguise mushrooms, bell peppers, zucchini and onions.
 - Baking. There are lots of muffin and cookie recipes that include carrots, zucchini or pumpkin.
 - Mashed potatoes. Try mashing cauliflower in with the potatoes.
- For more information on sneaking vegetables into food, please visit: www.thesneakychef.com

Do it right!

- Try cooking to different levels of tenderness. Changing how long you cook your vegetables for can make all the difference! Start with cooking them properly. Steam them so they are tender, but still crisp. If your child does not like them this way, try cooking them for longer or serving them raw.
- Not all vegetables need to be cooked the same way. For example, vegetables may be steamed, stir fried, grilled on the barbecue or roasted in the oven.
- To help improve the flavour of eggplant, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage and asparagus, try adding balsamic vinegar and parmesan cheese.



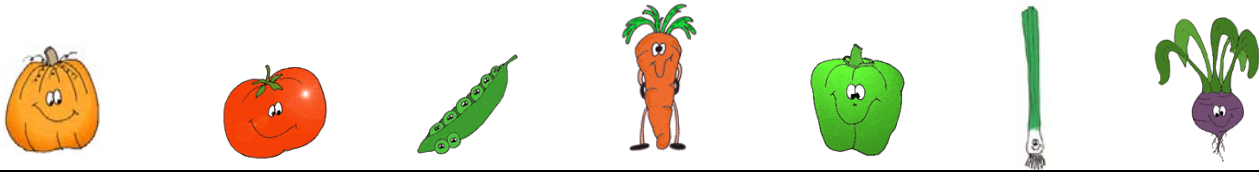
Main Attraction: 10 vegetable main dishes

1. **Portobello mushroom burger.** Marinate a large portobello mushroom in French or Italian dressing or make your own marinade with 1-1/2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, 1 teaspoon olive oil, a clove of minced garlic, salt and pepper. Grill over medium heat until tender, about 5 minutes on each side. Serve on a bun or alone.
2. **Spring greens with butternut squash.** Add 1 cup spring greens or leaf lettuce to a plate. In a small bowl, mix together 1/4 cup cooked butternut squash, 1/2 tablespoon brown sugar and 1/2 tablespoon olive oil. Top the greens with the squash mixture, 1/2 tablespoon sunflower seeds and 1 teaspoon honey.
3. **Asparagus, tomato and red pepper French bread pizza.** Arrange French bread slices on a baking sheet. Add pizza sauce and a mixture of diced asparagus, Roma tomatoes, red bell peppers and minced garlic. Sprinkle lightly with mozzarella cheese. Bake at 400°F until the cheese is lightly browned and the vegetables are tender, about 8 to 10 minutes.
4. **Grilled vegetable kebabs.** Brush cherry tomatoes, button mushrooms, zucchini slices, red onions and bell peppers with Italian dressing. Place onto skewers and grill over medium heat, turning often, until the vegetables are tender, about 5 to 8 minutes.
5. **Asparagus with almonds.** In a skillet, add 1/4 pound chopped asparagus and 1/4 cup water. Simmer until the asparagus is tender-crisp, about 4 to 6 minutes. Drain remaining water and stir in 1 teaspoon lemon juice and 1 teaspoon olive oil. Serve over 1/2 cup rice and top with roasted sliced almonds.



6. **Italian vegetables with pasta.** In a heavy skillet, add chopped sweet onions, red peppers, yellow summer squash, zucchini squash, 1 tablespoon olive oil, 2 minced garlic cloves and 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning. Saute until the vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes. Serve over cooked pasta and prepared pasta sauce.
7. **Honey-glazed sweet potatoes.** Peel and chop 4 large sweet potatoes. Toss with a mixture of 1/4 cup water, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, 2 tablespoons honey and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Arrange on a baking sheet. Cover with foil and bake at 375°F for 45 minutes. Remove the foil and bake another 15 minutes until the glaze is thick and the potatoes are tender.
8. **Corn and barley salad.** In a bowl, add 1 sliced cucumber, 2 cups cooked barley, 2 cups cooked corn and 3/4 cup chopped red bell peppers. Stir in the following dressing: 3 tablespoons white vinegar, 1 tablespoon water, 1 1/2 teaspoon oil, 1/2 teaspoon dried basil, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper. Marinate for at least 2 hours before serving.
9. **Fresh vegetable soup.** In a large pot, add 1 tablespoon olive oil and chopped vegetables, such as onions, carrots, green beans and celery. Saute until tender, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add 4 cups chicken or vegetable stock, 3 cups water, sliced potatoes (peeled), and season with salt, pepper and parsley. Bring to a boil and cook until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.
10. **Vegetable pita pockets.** In a small bowl, add cauliflower and broccoli florets, sliced green onions, diced tomatoes and cucumbers, and 1 1/2 teaspoons low-fat buttermilk or cucumber ranch salad dressing. Cut 1 whole-wheat pita bread in half and fill each half with the vegetable mixture and 1 tablespoon crumbled feta cheese. Warm in the microwave about 40 seconds.

Source: www.mayoclinic.com/health/food-and-nutrition/NU00203



Stuffed Bell Peppers

- 4 medium sweet bell peppers, (yellow, orange, green or red)
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
- 250g lean ground beef
- 1 garlic clove
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) onions, minced
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 1 28 oz can tomatoes (with juice), cut up
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) uncooked long-grain rice
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried basil
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) shredded cheese
- 1 cup (250 mL) tomato sauce

Preheat oven to 350°. Cut the tops off each pepper, pull out the stem portions and seeds. Chop enough to make 1/3 cup more or less. Clean out the rest of the pepper so no seeds remain and the center ribs are carved out to make room for stuffing. If pepper does not stand up straight, slice a little off the bottom of the pepper to level it out. In a large saucepan over med-high heat, cook the peppers in boiling water until crisp-tender, about 4 to 5 minutes. Be careful not to overcook or they will get soggy and hard to stuff. Remove from water and rinse with cold water to stop cooking process, drain & set aside. Heat olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat then brown ground beef; add garlic, onion, carrot, and reserved chopped peppers; saute until vegetables are tender, about 5 to 10 minutes. Add tomatoes, brown sugar, basil and salt and pepper to taste. Simmer until much of the liquid is absorbed, about 20 minutes. In the meantime, in a small pot, cook the rice according to the package instructions. Then add to the frying pan and mix well. Place peppers in a baking dish. Stuff hot meat mixture into peppers. Top with shredded cheese. Bake approximately 15 minutes. Serve covered with heated tomato sauce.

Source: Canadianliving.com



Stuffed Mushroom Caps

- 1 clove garlic, diced
- 1/2 bell pepper, chopped
- 1/3 onion, chopped
- 12 to 14 mushrooms
- 1/4 red, orange, yellow or green bell pepper
- 3 to 4 Tbsp chicken broth
- 1/2 piece whole grain toast (toasted and crumbled to soft bread crumbs)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Remove mushroom stems and dice. Saute garlic, peppers, onions, in 1 to 2 Tbsp chicken broth till tender (5 minutes). Add 1 Tbsp broth and remove from heat. Stir in bread crumbs. Add pepper and salt to taste. Place stuffing into 12 to 14 mushroom caps.

Place on foil lined tray brushed with olive oil and garlic.
Bake 15 minutes at 350°F.

Source:

<http://www.thatsmyhome.com/healthy/weight-watchers/stuffed-mushrooms.htm>

| Metric and Imperial Sizes | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 250 ml | = 1 cup |
| 175 ml | = ¾ cup |
| 125 ml | = ½ cup |
| 60 ml | = ¼ cup |
| 15 ml | = 1 tablespoon (Tbsp) |
| 5 ml | = 1 teaspoon (tsp) |
| 25 gram (g) | = 1 ounce (oz) |

Source of vegetable graphics: **Kids' Turn Central** at <http://www.kidsturncentral.com/>