



Helping Kids Like Vegetables



Parents and children seem to have more struggles over vegetables than any other kind of food. Offer vegetables in the same matter-of-fact way that all other foods are offered.

Start vegetables in infancy. Talk to your doctor or WIC program about how and when to begin solid foods. Some nutritionists recommend introducing vegetables before fruits, so baby gets used to the taste of vegetables first. If your baby doesn't seem thrilled with a new vegetable, don't assume he/she doesn't like it. Try it again next week. If it still doesn't win smiles, try it again in another week, and so on.

What if you have a toddler or preschooler who has decided already that he/she doesn't like vegetables? Here are 18 pointers that might help.

1. Don't force your child to eat anything he doesn't want to eat. Forcing only results in power struggles that nobody wins except a determined vegetable hater!
2. Offer positive encouragement, but do not bribe, reward, or lavish praise.
3. Teach your child how to politely turn down a food.
4. Don't take food refusals personally.
5. Avoid "labels." Resist making statements such as "He doesn't like cabbage," or "She won't eat anything green."
6. Serve small portions. Your child can ask for second helpings. This way your child will not feel overwhelmed, and you will not waste a lot of food.
7. Time meals and snacks so your child has an appetite when he comes to the table. Do not allow nibbling all day. Toddlers and preschoolers need regular meal and snack times spaced 2 or 3 hours apart.
8. Set a good example. Eat vegetables yourself.
9. Serve vegetables often. Try different ways of preparing them.
10. Pay attention to texture and color of cooked vegetables. Many children like them cooked "crisp-tender" not mushy. Overcooked vegetables lose their bright, attractive color.
11. Serve vegetables, whenever possible, as "finger foods." Even cooked vegetables can be eaten this way.
12. If salad doesn't appeal to your child, serve the salad ingredients as a vegetable/fruit tray. Also try dips.
13. Cut food into small pieces a child can manage successfully.
14. Make sure cooked vegetables are not served too hot.
15. A vegetable might seem more fun if it is served at snack time.
16. Let your child help choose and prepare vegetables. (see back page)
17. Find out what your child eats at child care, the neighbor's or grandma's house. A vegetable you have never considered might be a favorite.
18. Respect your child's individuality. Some children are more cautious about trying new foods. Everyone is allowed some food dislikes.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION
FOOD STAMP NUTRITION EDUCATION

Developed by Michigan State University Extension

Can I Help?

If you take your child to the grocery store, involve her/him in selecting vegetables. Ask:

- Which broccoli is prettier? Let's buy that one, then!
- Help me count out four potatoes.
- Please hold the bag as I fill it with Brussels sprouts.
- Which shall we buy for a salad, tomatoes or bell peppers?
- Do you see something that looks juicy (or crunchy, or shiny)?
- How should we cook this?



Think of safe, interesting ways your child can help prepare vegetables at home. Help him wash hands well before he handles food.

A toddler can ...

- pick peas out of pods
- help rinse vegetables.

A preschooler can ...

- stuff celery
- measure and pour
- mix and stir
- shuck corn
- snap green beans
- tear lettuce leaves
- break off cauliflowerets
- use a potato peeler, with close supervision.

Let your child choose a vegetable for a meal. You might want to offer a choice, such as, "Which should we have, white potatoes or sweet potatoes?"



A Reminder about Choking

Children develop the motor skills involved in chewing and swallowing at different rates. Each child is ready at his own pace to progress from soft, pureed food to more texture. Although a child can choke on any food, there are certain foods to be especially cautious about with very young children (under three years of age).

Unsafe

Cheese, marshmallow

Hard candy, popcorn, nuts and peanuts

Peanut butter, soft cheese

Raw, hard fruits and vegetables

Round, smooth foods such as grapes, hot dogs and hot dog rounds

To Make Safer

Cut into small pieces.

Do not offer.

Spread *thinly* on bread or crackers.

Cook hard fruits and vegetables. Peel and remove seeds. Slice very thin, chop or mash.

Quarter pieces.

To Make the Situation Safer

- Children should sit during meals and snacks.
- Eat with your children or at least be in the same room.
- Keep meal times calm, with quiet talking.
- Turn off the TV and limit other distractions.
- Encourage children to take small bites and chew well.