

## Tips to get Your Kids to Eat Vegetables

As parents or anyone who love children, we want what is only the very best for them. We wish only for a happy healthy future for them and there is no better way to do this than to feed them nutrient dense food. Foods that will defend them against chronic disease and cancer for decades to come. Teaching children to value what they place in their bodies will reap unimaginable rewards because they will be carrying these habits into adulthood and teaching their own children vital lifestyle choices. In today's society with what seems unending advertising to children, junk food being served at schools and even hospitals, and peer pressure to fit in, it is not easy. You will not be the popular parent and sometimes your kids will rebel but don't give up. The future that you are investing is so much more important than the temporary cries and screams of, "I don't like it!" The following tips may be helpful in raising children that love vegetables who understand the value and significance of nutrient dense foods.

### **Set the example. Eat as a family and model the behavior you want your kids to emulate.**

This has been found in research to be the most important key in getting kids to eat nutritious foods...what their parents eat! So grab those veggies mom and dad. You have heard the saying, "Kids catch more than they are taught." Basically, this is saying our children are watching us. If you don't want your kids to smoke, then don't smoke. If you want your kids to eat a healthy nutritious diet, you have to model the behavior! So time to veg up! "Genetics" is less about DNA and more about what we learned from our parents, including dietary and lifestyle habits.

**Make it fun and not stressful.** Meals should not be stressful with yelling and crying. Talk about their day, reflect on the good things that happened, tell a joke or two, decide on how many colors of the rainbow they ate that day....you get the picture.

**Get them involved. Get kids cooking.** Do you want your kids to know how to cook for themselves? Then time to get them in the kitchen. Even the littlest of ones should feel comfortable in the place where nourishment is born. From tearing lettuce leaves, to setting the table to making homemade salad dressings, kids love to help their parents. Kids are going to be more inclined to eat when they have helped prepare the meal. Bring even the youngest into the kitchen.

**Try one new food a week and Celebrate when they try them.** Exposure, exposure, exposure...so what do you think I mean by exposure? The more times your child is exposed to new foods the more likely they have a wide palate. It takes up to 15 taste exposures before anyone incorporates it into their palate. Every single step in the right direction deserves praise and a high five.

**Enforce the one bite rule but don't force them to finish.** Yes, you need to enforce the one bite rule. Kids need to understand that what is set before them is what they are getting to eat and that is it. Along with "what you see is what you get," your child should be strongly encouraged to try one simple bite or even licking it could count. Kids will finish their meals when they are full. They may mean they are eating a pound of food today and 1/4 pound tomorrow. That's okay as long as they are growing and do not have symptoms of malnourishment such as super low body weight.

**Explain how food will help them in terms they value and want.** Kids speak a different language than we do as adults. Telling a 5 year-old that eating his broccoli will make him healthy is going to go in one ear and out the other. Now, telling this same little person that eating his broccoli will make him run faster, grow stronger and be smarter than all his friends will perk him up and he might give it a bite.

**Make food colorful.** The SAD (Standard American Diet) has to be the saddest looking food in the world with just a few colors on a background of tan or brown. Now a whole foods plant-based diet rivals the colors of the rainbow and much more interesting to eat. Try to get the kids to challenge themselves to eat the colors of the rainbow every day and you can rest assured they are getting the vitamins and minerals they need.

**Place at least one healthy item on their plate that they like.** So you are adding new foods regularly and they are turning up their noses to most of the food choices. Give them hope by placing a HEALTHY plant-based option on the plate along side the new comer.

**Introduce new foods slowly.** If you do not have an adventurous eater take your time in introducing new foods. One food a week should do it or let them come with you to the grocery store to pick out what food they want to try next.

**Dip it. Hummus, peanut butter and quacamole.** Dipping veggies in sauces is just plain fun.

**Hide veggies.** Be stealthy with healthy foods. Hide kale in marinara sauce and smoothies. Make a fettuccine sauce out cauliflower. Use veggie or bean pasta instead of the white flour pasta.

**Make mornings count.** When your child wakes up in the morning they are likely going to be hungry. Make it breakfast count by feeding them nutritious foods that won't cause them to crash later in the day. Dump the sugary breakfast cereals for a more nutritious option like a veggie fruit smoothie, a steaming bowl of old fashioned oatmeal with berries and nuts, or a tofu scramble brimming with veggies wrapped up in a whole grain tortilla.

**Make sweets a rare occasion.** Sweets are not meant to be a daily occurrence. Not only do high sugary junk foods cause tooth decay but they also cause your child to have mood swings and develop food cravings at a young age.

**Offer a variety of foods.** Create curiosity about new foods by offering a variety of color, textures and flavors. Did you have Chinese last night? Tonight have Italian.

**Offer veggies alone first before other foods are on the plate.** When veggies don't have to compete with other foods they will more likely be eaten. Have the kids sit down to eat the vegetables first while you prepare the main entree.

**Make veggie popsicles and smoothies.** What child does not like popsicles? Blend veggies in with fruit and non-dairy milk and pour into a popsicle molds and freeze. In a few hours you have a delicious healthy dessert. These are great after school snacks too. You can also freeze fruits like grapes, berries, oranges and pineapple for a yummy treat.

**Roast veggies.** If your child does not like raw or boiled veggies, try roasting plain or with different glazes.

**Use carrots and cucumber slices in place of chips.**

**Keep kids away for advertising junk foods.** Turn off the television and quit buying junk food products that advertise to kids. Vote with your dollars. This is a great article to help parents navigate advertising and helping kids understand what they are seeing.

**Add dried fruits to cereals or use as snacks.** You can also make your own trail mix rather quickly with nuts, seeds, dried fruits and coconut shreds (unsweetened of course).

**Make your own ice cream.** Have the kids cut up the bananas and put them in the freezer for easy access. Then show them how to add a little non-dairy milk, cocoa powder and a handful of frozen fruit like cherries to create their own delightfully delicious dessert. (Blend in a high-powered blender for best results.)

**Give your kids the choice of eating their veggies raw or cooked.** Some kids have preferences and it will give them the feeling of some control in the decision-making process. Try blanching your veggies to give them a crunch on the outside but soft on the inside...boil or steam for a minute or two then dunk them in ice water.

**Freeze grapes or make frozen fruit kabobs for a quick snack.**

**Don't give choices or attempt to bribe them to eat.** This does not encourage them to expand their palate and you do not have the time to be a short-order cook. They will eat what is on their plates or wait until the next meal. Relax, they will be fine.

**Limit junk food snacks or do away with them all together.** I am pretty sure you already knew the fried chicken nuggets, french fries, and ice cream from the fast food establishment down the street is not the best meal for your growing child.

**Emphasize good manners.** Don't allow children to be disrespectfully when sharing they do not like a new food. No yelling or pushing the food away. Teaching good manners now will save you from disrespectful teenagers. Trust me on this!

**Grow an indoor/outdoor veggie or herb garden.** Educating your kids on how to grow food, harvest it and then cook it will encourage them to try the foods when they are being served on their plates.

**Have kids design their own pizzas with the vegetables.** What is more fun than making a pizza, just remove the dairy cheese and replace with a non-dairy cheese or leave it out all together, add a little extra pizza sauce and throw on the veggies and fruit like pineapple.

**Serve up vegetables in stir-fries.**

Stir frying foods can be a quick and nutritious option when you are in a time crunch.

**Have kids work up an appetite before they sit down to eat.** Not only is exercise good for them but it will increase their veggie consumption because they are hungry.

**Feed veggies to kids for snacks when they are hungry.** Most kids are hungry after school and there is no better time to bring out the carrot sticks or apple slice with a favorite nut butter or hummus.

**Create a festive theme once a week or month and recipes to match.** If it is Italian night then bring out the minestrone soup, spaghetti, and vegetable marinara sauce or create your own veggie pizza.

**Start your dinners with salads first before the entree is even served.** Have the kids make their own healthy dressings.

**Pack healthy school lunches.** Include veggies with dips, veggies on their pita bread sandwiches, or create wraps with veggies.

**Talk to your school about healthy eating options and education.** Adding a salad bar, having a chef come into the school and teach healthy recipes or encourage schools to start their own gardens.

**By all means keep junk food out of the house!**

**Avoid fruit juices, sodas and sugary drinks.** Kids or adults for that matter can't appreciate normal sweetness from whole fruits when they are drowning their taste buds in artificial concentrated sugars.

**Don't give up.**

**Your child's health is one the most important investments you will ever make.**