

## Helping Your Child Like Vegetables

Helping your child to eat more vegetables can be hard. Many vegetables are bitter in flavor, which children try to avoid. With effort, veggies can make their way onto your child's plate.

### Why?

Vegetables are like nature's multivitamin. They provide a perfect balance of vitamins and minerals to support the body. They are also a great source of fiber, carbohydrate and some protein. Veggies provide benefits that other food groups do not. Fruits and veggies are not the same.

It is important to create an environment that encourages even the pickiest children to try new vegetables. Picky eating often starts in the toddler and preschool years. This is when children want to be more independent in feeding themselves. Parents can support these desires by knowing the different feeding roles. Parents control the *what*, *when*, *where* and *how* food is served. A child controls *how much* is eaten.

### How much?

A good goal is 1 to 1 ½ cups of vegetables every day. This can be divided into three ½-cup servings throughout the day. Vegetable **juices should be limited to ½ cup per day**. Children may eat more on a "hungry" day and less on a "not-hungry" day. The average is what counts!

### When and where to eat?

Children do well when they are on a schedule. Routine eating with scheduled meal and snack times promotes healthy habits and discourages grazing. It is also best to:

- Eat at a table away from distractions like TV, phones and other electronics.
- Eat after playtime. Your child will be hungry and more relaxed.
- Eat together as a family.

### What can I do?

- Be a good role model and enjoy your veggies too!
- Do not assume children will dislike vegetables.
- Offer plain vegetables at first. Children many enjoy them without additional flavors.
- Serve vegetables with both meals and snacks. Children may need to see a vegetable 10-15 times before they are ready to try it.
- At the store, invite your child to pick out a new vegetable they want to try.
- Grow a garden to teach your child where vegetables come from. Try patio tomatoes, purple green beans, lettuce, beets or radishes.
- Allow children to help prepare a meal. They can shuck peas, snap green beans, pour frozen vegetables into a bowl, place veggie pieces on a pizza or assemble a sandwich with lettuce and tomato.
- Point out fun facts about vegetables.
- Avoid using dessert as a bribe to eat vegetables. Your child may then see veggies as "yucky" next to the "good" dessert.
- Create interest with veggie play and serve them up in new ways!

### New ways to serve veggies

- Most kids enjoy crunchy vegetables. Slightly undercook steamed green beans, carrot sticks or broccoli to provide a crisp veggie with a crunch.
- Try roasting vegetables in the oven to bring out their natural sweetness.
- Grate veggies such as squash, carrots, zucchini or pumpkin and add to muffin, bread, or pancake batter or mix into spaghetti sauce, chili or soup.

- Mix different vegetables and fruits on a toothpick for a colorful snack.
- Use cookie cutters to create cucumber moons or star-shaped squash.
- Fill a celery slice with nut butter or Greek yogurt and add raisin “ants” along the top.
- Serve vegetables as a snack with a healthy dip such as refried beans, hummus, cottage cheese, guacamole or a yogurt-based dressing.
- Use veggies for edible art with carrot coins, green pepper mustaches, broccoli trees or asparagus batons.

#### References:

- [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)
- [www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org)
- [www.ellynsatter.com](http://www.ellynsatter.com)
- *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health 2002
- *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family*, by Ellyn Satter, Kelcy Press, 2008

#### Teach Back

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at [www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2017 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#240