

Helping Your Child Like Vegetables

Helping your child eat more vegetables can be hard but serving them early on and often will pay off.

Why Your Child Needs Vegetables

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

Create a setting that helps even a picky child 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 them by knowing the feeding roles. Parents control the **what, when, where** and **how** food is served. A child controls **how much** is eaten.

Amount

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. **Limit vegetable juices 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

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

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

Tips

- Be a good role model and enjoy your vegetables too!
- Do not assume children will dislike them.
- Offer vegetables even if you do not like them.
- Offer plain vegetables at first. Older children many enjoy them with other flavors.
- Serve them 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 to try.
- Grow a garden to teach your child where vegetables come from. Try patio tomatoes, green beans, lettuce, carrots 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 make a sandwich with lettuce and tomato.
- Point out fun facts about vegetables.
- Avoid using dessert as a bribe. Your child may then see vegetables as “yucky” next to the “good” dessert.
- Avoid hiding vegetables as this can make children think they should not like them.
- Create interest by serving them up in new ways!

New Ways to Serve Vegetables

- Most kids enjoy crunchy vegetables. Slightly undercook steamed green beans, carrot sticks or broccoli to provide a crunch.
- Try roasting them in the oven to bring out their natural sweetness.
- Grate squash, carrots, zucchini or pumpkin and add to muffin, bread, or pancake batter or mix into spaghetti sauce, chili or soup.
- Mix 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 them as a snack with a healthy dip such as refried beans, hummus, cottage cheese, guacamole or a yogurt-based dressing.
- Use them to make art you can eat with carrot coins, green pepper mustaches, broccoli trees or asparagus batons.
- Don’t be afraid to cook with a little salt, pepper, herbs, oil, or butter.

Websites

www.choosemyplate.gov
www.brightfutures.org
www.ellynsatter.com

Books

Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition, 2nd 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

Who to Call

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.

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**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

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 © 10/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#240