

“Try it – you’ll like it!”

Vegetables and fruit for children



Nutrition

Colourful and crunchy fruit and vegetables can be enjoyed by children. Many babies eat fruit and vegetables as their first foods. After the first year children may become fussier with fruit and vegetables as they become independent eaters. This can be worrying but is not harmful.

It is not possible to force children to eat more fruit and vegetables. The best way is for parents to eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day themselves. Children learn by watching their parents and family, so keep trying.

There are many reasons for everyone to enjoy a wide variety of vegetables and fruit. Vegetables and fruit provide important vitamins such as Vitamin C and folic acid, and other plant substances that help prevent some diseases.

How much fruit and vegetables?

Children's serving sizes of fruits and vegetables may be small, and depend on age, appetite and activity. Children may eat more or less on some days than others. Even small amounts of different coloured fruit and vegetables are great.

Sometimes children learn to expect 'tastier' high fat and sugar snack foods instead, or parents give up offering vegetables or fruit because children leave these behind. Try to be patient and keep offering. Remember that any amount of vegetables and fruit is better than none, and look for ways to include more. Focus on lots of different coloured vegetables and fruit, not the amounts.

How can I get my child to eat vegetables and fruit?

The first step is for you to eat and enjoy vegetables and fruit every day as a family.

Keep offering vegetables and fruit in a variety of ways, as children learn to eat what is familiar to them. Try to relax and enjoy mealtimes and avoid focus on what your child does or doesn't eat.

Never assume that your child dislikes a particular vegetable or fruit; the next time you offer may be when they try it. Children's tastes change with age.

1. Taking part

- involve your child in choosing fruit or vegetables to try
- take your child shopping and let them see, smell and feel the fruit and vegetables with you
- let your child help wash and prepare fruit and vegetables. Use this opportunity to explore new colours and shapes
- grow some vegetables or herbs in the garden or pots

2. Enjoyment

- enjoy meals together with your children whenever possible. When children see you enjoying a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, they are more likely to join in
- sometimes children may prefer raw vegetables instead of cooked
- children may refuse new foods if mealtimes are stressful, so focus on the positives about the meal and avoid arguments

3. Presentation

- keep a bowl of fresh fruit handy, and vegetables such as peas, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots and mushrooms in the fridge for a quick snack
- serve different coloured fruit and vegetables, chop them up and make them look great on the plate

4. Include fruit and vegetables wherever possible

- include vegetables and fruit in a range of ways, at most meals and snacks
- increase the variety or amount of vegetables in your favourite recipes such as pasta sauce, soup or stir-fries
- include vegetables and fruit in snacks. Try corn on the cob, jacket potato, cut up vegetables with salsa or dips, muffins, pikelets or cakes made with fruit or vegetables. Enjoy frozen fruit or vegetable segments, fruit skewers, stewed fruit, fruit crumbles, and tinned fruits in juice, fruit salad or a fruit platter

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5. Keep trying

- children need to learn, or sometimes re-learn, to enjoy fruit and vegetables. Your job is to make them available. Some children may need to see a fruit or vegetable 10 times or more on the plate before they try it
- always add a small serving on children’s plates; encourage them to try, but let them decide whether or not to eat
- try some crunchy raw vegetables before the main meal, or for snacks when children are most hungry. Resist the urge to offer less healthy snacks at the same time
- avoid making other options to the meal you have prepared. Children may choose to leave certain foods, but learn to accept meals offered if no alternatives are provided
- try a new fruit and vegetable once a week

What type of fruit and vegetables are healthiest?

All vegetables and fruits are healthy! Fruit and vegetables have similar nutrition. Some children eat fruit but need more time to learn to like vegetables.

Fruit and vegetables can be any colour, shape, texture or variety. They can be fresh, frozen, tinned or dried. They may be raw, cooked, steamed, boiled, micro-waved, stir-fried, or roasted. Variety is most important.

Choose different coloured fruit and vegetables, particularly yellow, green and red. For example melon, carrot, pumpkin, stone fruit, broccoli, spinach, berries, leafy greens and tomato.

What about?

Frozen, tinned and dried?

Frozen, tinned fruits and vegetables are available any time of the year and can save you money when the fresh varieties are out of season. These have similar amounts of vitamins to fresh products. Dried fruits are nutritious, but have a high amount of natural sugars. Dried fruit can stick to the teeth and increase the risk of dental decay.

Fruit and vegetable juices?

Fruit and vegetable juices are not necessary. It is best to eat fruit or vegetables instead and enjoy water to drink. Fruit and vegetable juices may have vitamins, but they are high in sugars and low in fibre. If you include juice in your child’s diet, limit this to one small glass per day.

Potato chips and crisps?

Chips and crisps are made from potatoes, but are prepared by cooking in oil. They are high in fat and salt and best eaten only occasionally.

Fruit bars/straps?

These usually contain some fruit, but are also very high in sugar, low in fibre and stick to children’s teeth so are best avoided. Enjoy a fresh fruit platter or frozen fruit pieces instead.

Pesticides?

The amount of pesticides on fresh vegetables and fruit is low and considered safe, even in very young children and breastfeeding mothers. Wash vegetables and fruit before eating.

Organic?

Some families may choose organic fruits and vegetables. These are often more expensive than other fruit and vegetables; and are not needed for good health.

Choking on raw vegetables and fruit?

Toddlers and young children can enjoy raw fruit and vegetables. Children should always be seated and supervised while eating all foods, including chopped raw fruit and vegetables and all ‘hard’ foods.

Important tips about fruit and vegetables

- eat and enjoy a variety of fruit and vegetables yourself
- focus on serving lots of different vegetables and fruit, not the amounts
- try and offer fruit and vegetables at each meal and snack
- involve children in decisions about vegetables and fruit
- keep offering fruit and vegetables even when children seem to avoid eating them
- seek advice if worried about your child’s growth, appetite or development

Nutrition

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