

Food for Thought

April 2024

Raise Children Who Eat Their Vegetables

It is possible to raise kids who like eating a wide variety of vegetables. The secret is to never bribe or threaten them to eat. Make the foods available that you want children to eat and they will grow to enjoy most of those foods. Here are some simple steps to encourage your children:



Enjoy a variety of vegetables yourself. Be a role model with healthy habits. If you eat vegetables, so will your children. Don't make it a big deal, just make vegetables a tasty part of every meal.

Grow a vegetable garden. Kids love to pick and eat almost anything that they have grown themselves. There is more than one way to grow your own fresh vegetables. You could use a container on the porch if you don't have a garden area. If you have space, dig up a backyard plot. Or join a local community garden.

Cut up vegetables for meals and snacks. Serve a small plate of bite-sized vegetables at every meal. Try broccoli trees, baby carrots, celery sticks, cucumber slices, sweet pepper pieces or sugar snap pea pods. If desired, add some low-fat Ranch dip or hummus. If vegetables are ready to eat in the refrigerator, they will become a go to snack for your kids.

Serve bright, colorful vegetables. Everyone eats with their eyes first. Children (and adults) will find bright and colorful vegetables more appealing. Overcooked, mushy vegetables are likely to turn everyone off. Keep vegetables brightly colored and crunchy in texture when cooking them by steaming or microwaving them for just a few minutes or eat them raw.

Be adventurous with vegetables. When children see vegetables as tasty and fun, they are much more likely to enjoy eating them. Buy new items and try new recipes.

Let children participate in choosing vegetables. Involving kids in planning, shopping, and preparing will encourage vegetable consumption. Ask your children if they want to try the carrots cooked or raw at a meal and you will be impressed by their willingness to eat them.

Incorporate vegetables into your favorite meals & snacks:

- Add spinach to a smoothie made with fruit and milk
- Serve baked tortilla chips with salsa (packed with tomatoes, onions and peppers)
- Add finely chopped tomatoes or spinach to a cheese quesadilla
- Include some leafy lettuce in tacos or on a sandwich
- Pair vegetable sides with a favorite topping like low-fat cheese sprinkled on broccoli
- Add some shredded carrots or zucchini to spaghetti sauce or chili



Black Bean + Veggie Lettuce Wraps

1 cup low sodium black beans, drained and rinsed
½ cup red pepper, diced
½ c. onion, diced
¼ c. shredded carrots
¼ cup Southwestern salad dressing, low-fat

2 Tbsp. green onion, diced
½ c. corn, fresh, canned, or frozen
8 Romaine lettuce leaves
1 T. cilantro, chopped

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash vegetables prior to preparing them.
3. In a medium bowl, combine black beans, red pepper, onion, corn, cilantro, and green onion.
4. Add salad dressing to bean mixture. Mix gently.
5. Place lettuce leaves on a plate or serving dish. Spoon the black bean mixture into lettuce leaves. Top with shredded carrots.



Sweet Corn Salsa

4 1/2 cups sweet corn (about 6 ears)
6 tbsp green onion (about 3)
3/4 tsp salt

3/4 cup cilantro (about 3/4s of a bunch)
3 tbsp lime juice (about 1 1/2 limes)

1. Wash your hands for twenty seconds with soap and water. Start with a clean work surface and utensils.
2. Rinse and cut kernels off the cobs of corn. You can also use canned or frozen corn.
3. Rinse and chop cilantro.
4. Rinse, trim roots, and slice green onions.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together lime juice and salt.
6. Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl.
7. Enjoy right away or refrigerate for one hour before serving.



Serving Suggestion: great with chicken or fish tacos on whole grain tortillas.

Sources <https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/how-to-get-kids-to-eat-vegetables>; <https://food.unl.edu/recipe/black-bean-and-veggie-lettuce-wraps>; <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=bul1025>; retrieved 04/03/24

Eat Smart Idaho can help you learn how to eat well for less. For information on Eat Smart Idaho classes, contact the Nutrition Instructor in your county:

Panhandle: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai & Shoshone Counties
208-292-2525

North Central Idaho: Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, & Nez Perce Counties
208-883-2267



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