

## Getting Kids to Eat Vegetables

Many adults have terrible memories of being forced to eat vegetables as children. Many parents dread 'food fights' over veggies with their own children at the dinner table. While it is important for kids to eat more vegetables, there is a kinder, gentler, and more successful way to approach the issue. Here's how to avoid fights about vegetables and get children to actually enjoy eating their vegetables.

### What we know

Given the importance of vegetables for health and nutrition, there has been a significant amount of research on children and their vegetable intake.

**Children are not eating enough produce:** Children's average vegetable consumption is far below recommended levels and has actually fallen over the past five years. Kids especially need to eat more dark green and orange vegetables.

**Children are neo-phobic about foods:** *Neo-phobic* is another way of saying that kids are naturally suspicious of new foods and often reluctant to even touch them. Some children are more reluctant than others; some react strongly to new textures as well.

**Children need positive role models:** Children are always watching what those around them are eating. When parents, grandparents, caregivers, and other children enjoy their veggies, kids tend to be more interested in trying them.

### What you can do

#### Serve a variety of vegetables in a variety of ways.

- Since children may need to see a new food many times before they want to even taste it, serving veggies often helps kids get familiar with how they look and smell.
- Veggies can be prepared in many ways - raw, steamed, stir-fried, roasted, baked, and grilled. Kids who won't touch cooked spinach might love a baby spinach salad.

#### Be a vegetable role model for children.

- The simplest, most effective way to get kids to eat their veggies is to eat yours. While this may not have an immediate effect, over time it will help kids eat a variety of food.
- Gardening is a great way to get kids more interested in vegetables. They are usually more willing to try garden fresh items - often before they make it to the dinner table.

#### Refrain from forcing or bribing children to eat any food.

- Forcing or bribing children to eat veggies (or any other food) often makes them more suspicious of that item. They actually tend to eat less of the food in these situations.
- The best approach is a matter-of-fact one: *This is the tasty vegetable we are serving for this meal. It tastes great - and I hope that you will enjoy eating it like I am.*