

Getting Children to Eat Vegetables: A Critical Thinking Approach

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Many children say they do not like vegetables, but usually they have never tasted the vegetable they claim not to like. Research shows that many children have not tasted vegetables because parents have not made them available in the home or have not provided them in a form in which children can easily eat. Let's face it, few children will take the time to wash a head of broccoli or cauliflower, break the pieces apart, serve them up on a plate, and then eat them.



Using punishment, threats, force, or even offering the child a reward have been shown to be unsuccessful ways of teaching children to eat vegetables.

Parents can increase the chances that their children will eat a particular vegetable if it is in a small container or individual plastic bag in the refrigerator. Then children can choose the vegetable and eat it while watching television or sitting around the home.

Children's food habits are formed at an early age. Research now shows early eating habits may carry over into adulthood. It is important for parents to introduce good eating habits in children when they are young. However, it is never too late to start.

Exploring Ways to Get Children to Eat Vegetables

Be a role model. Offer vegetables to children by eating them yourself. Let children approach them on their own.

Set some rules. Children usually will accept vegetables in an environment where parents set appropriate rules. For example, it is okay to tell your child they need to taste a vegetable before they decide they do not like it.

Stay positive. Using strategies such as punishment, threats, force, or even offering the child a reward have been shown to be unsuccessful ways of teaching children to eat vegetables. Vegetables should be offered in a relaxed environment.

Don't give up. Keep offering the vegetables. It might be helpful to offer the vegetable the child dislikes in different ways or mixing the vegetable with other foods. Many parents tend to throw in the towel after the child refuses a vegetable the first time. Children generally have a fear of new foods. It may take about 8 to 10 tries with a vegetable before your child is ready to taste it. In addition, it may take a lot more tasting before your child gets to the point where he or she likes the vegetable. Be patient as your child experiences new foods.

Be creative. Offer children vegetables in different forms (cooked, raw, and mixed with other foods) before you decide they do not like them.

Be flexible. Children vary in how much they eat and what they like. Each child is an individual. Do not have predetermined ways in which your child should eat or accept vegetables.

Be reasonable. Keep in mind that vegetable servings for children are smaller than vegetable servings for adults. A general guideline is one tablespoon of vegetable for each year of life. Do not have unrealistic expectations for your child.

Give options. Offer a variety of vegetables at a particular meal. This allows children to be able to choose a vegetable they like.

Take Action: Make it Happen

Vegetables offers protection from many diseases and thanks to the vitamins and minerals they provide, improves your child's health. It is important for children to eat the recommended amount of vegetables daily. Parents here are some tricks of the trade:

- Offer vegetables daily. Children will not eat vegetables if parents do not cook and serve them.
- Let children pick out a vegetable of the week at the grocery store.
- Make vegetables easy for children to get to and eat. Have ready to eat vegetable snacks in small bags in the refrigerator.
- Set out a plate of vegetables and dip before dinner or when children get home from school.

It is amazing what children will eat when they are hungry. Remember to serve vegetables with a dip children love.

- Prepare vegetables in a way in which they are tender but crisp. Children tend to dislike mushy vegetables and many prefer raw vegetables for this reason.
- Include two vegetables at dinner; a cooked and a raw vegetable are good options. This allows children to have a choice of vegetable they want to eat.
- Add lettuce leaves to sandwiches.
- Add blended vegetables such as spinach to spaghetti sauce, soups and casserole. Children generally do not know they are included and they get the health benefit of the vegetable. It is a good idea to blend or cut up the vegetable finely before adding it to spaghetti sauce.
- Make food fun. Let children create funny faces or animals with cut up vegetables.
- Let children help prepare vegetable recipes, they generally enjoy what they have made.
- Allow kids to make their own salad. Put out small bowls of baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, shredded leaf lettuce, raisins, fruit, and crunch noodles. They love the feeling of control that comes from doing it themselves.
- Try heirloom vegetables. Kids get excited about interesting vegetables. Take your children

to a farmer's market and have them pick out the heirlooms they would like to try.

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