

HOW TO GET YOUR KIDS TO EAT MORE FRUITS AND VEGGIES

by Debora Robinett, MA, RD, CD

As children go back to school, many parents refocus their attention on their child's nutrition, and I am often asked how they can get their child to eat more fruits and vegetables. As a registered dietitian, mother of three and now a grandmother, I have some tips for parents and caregivers that may help get more nutrition into those picky eaters.



KEEP FRESH, WASHED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES visible in a fruit bowl and in the refrigerator. Wash and cut up vegetables so they are ready to eat.

INCLUDE A VARIETY OF RAW VEGGIES. Serve a large platter of a variety of raw veggies as hors d'oeuvres every night with a fun dip of guacamole or hummus. You can also create your own cool-colored dips with beets and peas, or carrots and turmeric. Let your child select the vegetables but continue to include their lesser favorites, as constant exposure without pressure produces great vegetable eaters.

SERVE SALADS MORE OFTEN! Explore different leafy greens such as spinach, spring mix, kale, romaine, red and green leaf lettuce, arugula and watercress. Try a cabbage slaw or shredded broccoli or carrot salad in place of the less nutritious iceberg lettuce salads. Teach your child about healthy oils and salad dressings that can be used in moderation.

EXPLORE VEGETARIAN RECIPES for lasagna, spaghetti sauce, soups and chili that replace meat with vegetables. Try experimenting with riced cauliflower for crusts in pizza or an alternative to mashed potatoes, kale chips in place of corn or potato chips, and homemade baked, sweet potato fries instead of regular fries.

MAKE YOUR OWN FRESH JUICES AND SMOOTHIES. Add spinach and berries to bump up the nutrition in your smoothies. It's also fun to make frozen fruit popsicles by blending or juicing your child's favorite produce combinations.

SERVE FRUIT AND VEGGIES WITH EVERY MEAL. Consider adding fruit to cereal, fresh fruit and a raw veggie with hummus in a lunch, a snack of vegetables and dip after school, and both a salad and one or two cooked vegetables as part of the dinner meal.

VISIT A FARMER'S MARKET OR FARM! Take your child to your local farm or farmer's market and introduce them to fruits and vegetables that aren't sold in plastic packaging. There you can seek out new and fun foods like star fruit, heirloom tomatoes, and purple cauliflower and potatoes!

OFFER BOTH RAW AND COOKED forms of the vegetable. Some children prefer raw broccoli or carrots to the cooked form.

PLANT A SMALL GARDEN at home or ask if there is a spot to plant one at your child's school. Many children don't know where their food comes from.

LOAD UP ON PRODUCE so you'll always have some on hand. When shopping the grocery store, start in the area where fresh fruits and vegetables are sold.

BE A ROLE MODEL and eat more fruits and vegetables yourself. Eat as a family as much as you can. Research shows that children eat more produce and less packaged, processed foods when they eat with the entire family.

Eating more fruits and vegetables now will help your child establish healthy and nutritional habits that will last for the rest of his or her life.

Debora Robinett, MA, RD, CD, is a registered dietitian and author of the children's book, Ned Visits Food Land. The fully illustrated 32-page story follows a young boy from the city as he travels to a family member's farm. This fun and inspiring book, written for children ages 3-8 years old, offers a simple message of teaching children where their food comes from, as well as supporting their parents and caregivers in providing a whole-food diet filled with fruits and vegetables. You can find Debora's book at Marlene's Market & Deli in Tacoma. For more information, visit DeboraRobinett.com.

