

Getting kids to eat vegetables

January 23 2009, By Barbara Quinn

Several years ago, I did a study in graduate school to determine why some children like vegetables and many do not. Two findings emerged from my "research" with 6 and 7 year olds: Children who had opportunity to help grow and/or prepare vegetables liked to eat them. And even when moms prepared most of the meals, kids tended to copy how dad ate.

Today we are still trying to figure out kids and vegetables. A recent survey conducted for the Jolly Green Giant Corp. found that 25 of every 100 parents think it is more likely for their child to become president than to eat their recommended daily amount of vegetables (1 cup for toddlers, 2 to 3 cups for older children).

Here are some current suggestions from experts on how to get vegetables into our little darlings' daily diet:

- Be consistent. Junior will only learn that vegetables are a normal part of meals if vegetables are a normal part of meals. Place a serving on his plate but don't force him to eat. Most children will eventually try a bite.
- Be persistent. Studies show that a child may need to be exposed to a new food 8-15 times before she decides if she truly likes or dislikes it. Parents who calmly offer vegetables along with other foods can help a child gradually overcome their resistance.
- Play the rainbow game. Take your child food shopping and ask him to pick out different colored vegetables. Then encourage him to try one

color each day of the week.

- Offer pint-sized pieces. Allow toddlers to practice their fine motor skills with soft-cooked beans, peas or chopped carrots.
- Sneak it in. Shred or puree nutrient-dense vegetables such as cauliflower or carrots into pasta sauce. Use pureed vegetables to thicken soups.
- Be a role model. Ouch. Remember that habits are caught more than they are taught. And if mom and dad don't eat vegetables, good luck getting junior to dive in.
- Eat meals together. Studies continue to show that children and teens who eat frequent meals with their families eat more fruits and vegetables (even dark green ones), and drink fewer soft drinks than those whose families are too busy to eat meals together.
- Consider convenience. Fresh vegetables are only best if they don't languish in the refrigerator for days and days before we eat them. On the other hand, nutrients in frozen vegetables are relatively stable for up to a year. Keep both on hand for little tykes. And consider planting a vegetable garden this spring ...

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