



New Year, New Strategies for Veggie-Loving Kids



Is your child eating 1 to 1 ½ cups of vegetables each day, as recommended (depending on age) by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans? Chances are the answer is no, since data show that only about 10% of kids age 4 to 13 get enough vegetables. Here are some kid-tested strategies for getting your family on track for the New Year.

Set a Healthy Table—and a Good Example. Serve the same meal to everyone in the family – no more short order cook. When there are no other choices, and kids see Mom and Dad enjoying what’s on offer, they are more likely to expand their favorites. That’s something that won’t happen if you serve them chicken nuggets or macaroni and cheese every night. Hot tip: keep foods separate on the plate; many kids don’t like different foods that are mixed together.



Actions speak louder than words. Once you’ve set the table with only healthy choices, zip your lips, and let your children make their own choices about which foods to eat and how much. This helps them learn to listen to hunger cues, something that doesn’t happen if you insist they clean their plates.

Make Good Food Fun. Kids love colorful foods and, at an age where they’re just learning the names of colors, it can be fun to print out a rainbow and let them put a star on the corresponding color each time they eat a vegetable that matches. **Research** shows that giving fun names to foods (such as “dinosaur trees” for broccoli or “x-ray vision carrots”) encourages kids to eat more of them, too.



Another strategy is to put out plates of carrot sticks, peppers and other cut vegetables along with dips like salsa, hummus or ranch dressing while you’re fixing dinner. You’ll be catching your children at their hungriest this way, and avoiding that pre-dinner whining period where you used to say, “No, you can’t have a snack; it’s too close to dinner.” **One study** showed kids ate 80% more raw broccoli with a dip!



Nudge...Just a little. While in general it’s best to avoid cajoling during meals, many parents find kids need a little nudge when confronted with new foods. Many families use the “one-bite” rule successfully: each person must try at least one bite of every food on the plate, each time it’s served. Children may need as many as 12-15 tries before they decide they like a food, and each bite gets them closer to that tipping point. One mother we know used to tell her pre-schoolers, “You’re probably just too young to like that. You’ll like it when you’re



older.” Little kids are always eager to feel more grown up, so that’s a powerful incentive to reconsider and try again, next time that food is served.

What about dessert? Get in the habit of simply serving fresh fruit for dessert except on special occasions, and there’ll be no need to insist anyone finish their vegetables before they’re eligible for dessert.

Get Kids Involved. Kids who help shop for, grow, or cook food are more likely to try new foods, too. Invite each child to pick an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable when you go shopping. Plant green beans and harvest them together. Invite children to stir the sauce, toss the salad, or decorate their own pita pizza with a veggie face.

Remember, you’re the grown-up here, and you’re in charge. Kids all around the world eat vegetables, and your kids will too, with strategies like these.