



William J Mesibov MD, FAAP Stuart J Altman MD, FAAP Linda H Jacobs MD, FAAP
575 Underhill Blvd Syosset, NY 11753 A Division of ProHEALTHcare

575 Underhill Boulevard Syosset, New York 11791 516.921.2122 www.kidfixer.com

Veggies

Kids hate veggies - but do they have to? Vegetables are so good for kids. They're a great source of vitamins, fiber and complex carbohydrates. They're also virtually fat-free and are sweet tasting. So why don't more kids like veggies? Why must parents bargain and beg to get their children to eat "just 3 more peas," or "one more piece of broccoli"? One reason is that toddlers often find veggies too fibrous; they'd prefer easier-to-chew fruits, which, by the way, are excellent substitutes for the finicky 2 or 3 year-old. Another reason, however, is this: most people don't know how to prepare vegetables.

Many parents think that serving vegetables means opening a can of mixed veggies or defrosting a package of frozen peas, and putting a couple of tablespoons of this unseasoned, unappetizing stuff alongside the chicken and fries. More adventurous moms might add a dab of butter. This does little to improve the taste and adds unwanted saturated. Interestingly, many of our Italian-American parents seem to have the right idea. A surprising number of their kids love veggies. Why the difference? Take a look at this recipe, from one of our Mediterranean moms:

Momma's string beans and garlic

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound whole green beans, ends trimmed
3 cloves slivered garlic
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon water
salt and pepper to taste

Heat the oil in a large skillet, over high heat. Add the beans and garlic; cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add the lemon juice, water, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, about 4 to 5 minutes; beans will soften but should not be mushy.

This is a simple and quick recipe -- one that can be used with other veggies as well, such as spinach, broccoli or escarole. Similarly, many of our Indian families make spicy and incredibly tasty vegetable dishes. Our own kids often refused veggies, but loved spicy gobi and

saag. We never had the heart to tell them they were eating cauliflower and spinach. Here's a good Indian recipe for cauliflower and potatoes:

Mata's Aloo Gobi

1 cauliflower broken into florets
2 medium potatoes, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 onion, coarsely chopped
1/2 green pepper, coarsely chopped
2 ripe tomatoes, coarsely chopped
1/2 cup green peas (frozen are fine)
1/2 tsp ginger
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp chili powder
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp coriander
3 tbs vegetable oil
1 tsp salt

Heat oil in a frying pan. Add ginger and garlic and stir. Add onions and fry over medium heat until slightly browned. Add chopped tomato, green pepper and peas. Cook until tender. Add chili powder, cumin, turmeric, coriander and salt. Mix well. Add cauliflower and potato and stir. Saute for 5 minutes. Cover the pan and cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are soft and cauliflower is tender but crunchy.

Don't let the oil "frighten" you. Although it adds fat to a recipe, it's not "bad fat." Also, a child who fills up on green beans or cauliflower will be less likely to be hungry later and munch on more fattening and less healthy snack items. Some parents, in their concern about keeping down fat, prepare their vegetables (and other foods as well) in such a bland way that children are unlikely to accept them. In other words, it's well worth the fat calories to have a child who grows up thinking that green beans are tasty, not some dreaded "tax" you must pay so that you can get your dessert.

The same applies to eating raw veggies. It's well worth giving a child a dip or some tasty salad dressing to accompany raw veggies. Certainly the veggies-plus-dip calories are going to be less than the potato-chips-

plus-dip calories. Also, the nutritional benefits of the veggies are well worth the few grams of fat supplied by the dip.

Here's one more recipe from an experienced "chef."

Dr. Mesibov's braised winter veggies

2 medium carrots, peeled
1 medium parsnip, peeled
2 small turnips (8 ounces total), peeled
2 small onions
1 medium bulb fennel, trimmed
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 bouquet garni (1 sprig fresh thyme, 1 bay leaf, and 4 parsley stems, tied with twine)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup water (or 1/4 cup chicken broth and 1/4 cup water)
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs (I like a mix of parsley, thyme, and chives)

Heat the oven to 350 degrees F. Cut the carrots and parsnip on the diagonal into 1-inch chunks. Cut the turnips and onions into wedges about 1 inch thick at their widest point. Split the fennel bulb lengthwise, notch out the core, and then cut the fennel crosswise into 1-inch slices. Heat the olive oil in a medium (9-inch) Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the other vegetables, the bouquet garni, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste. Raise the heat to medium high and cook until the vegetables are lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the water or broth and bring to a boil. Cover the pot, put it in the oven, and bake until the vegetables are fully cooked but still hold their shape, 20 to 25 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables to a serving bowl. Bring the pan juices to a boil over medium heat. (If there's a lot of liquid left, boil until reduced to about 1/4 cup.) Discard the bouquet garni. Whisk in the butter and herbs. Spoon the sauce over the vegetables and serve.

Below are some more tips on making veggies more "kid-friendly."

- **Try new things.** When dinner is served, all members at the table should be encouraged to sample all the foods that are available. In other words, Jr. may be reluctant to try the cold mixed salad, but he should at least be encouraged to sample it (tell him he can even spit it out if he doesn't like it!). Hopefully, he'll like it, but even if he doesn't, he has gotten into the commendable habit of sampling different flavors and textures.

- **Involve them.** Encourage your children to participate in the preparation of the family dinner, or at least one particular dish, which contains vegetables. It's more fun to eat your own creation! As an added bonus, the children who participate in the recipe have familiarity with the ingredients, which makes the dish "less strange".

- **Be creative.** If a child refuses to eat certain vegetables, then it's best not to serve them again right? Wrong. If your children do not like a vegetable served in a particular manner, try preparing it with a completely different recipe. For example, the child who has refused to eat sauteed zucchini might like it topped with a bit of spaghetti sauce.

- **Employ "sneaky tactics".** Add mashed sweet potato, broccoli, cauliflower or a bit of V8 juice to mashed potatoes. Mix pureed veggies into pasta sauce or ground beef.

- **Make vegetables fun!** Try preparing works of art on your child's plate using colorful vegetables; the carrot can be a nose, the potatoes can be eyes, corn on the cob for a mouth and so on. Also, let your kids know that it's okay with you if they sometimes eat their veggies with their fingers. What better way to make it fun!

- **Plan your attack.** Prepare vegetables ahead of time, so that when your kids need a snack in a rush, they are readily available. For example, peel and slice some carrots and keep them in your fridge so that the following day, you can throw them on a plate, in a hurry.



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