



'Try it – you'll like it!' Vegetables and fruit for children

Colourful and crunchy fruit and vegetables can be an enjoyable part of your child's life. Most babies eat fruit and vegetables as one of their first solid foods. After the first year parents may see their child become fussier as they become independent eaters. Often this fussiness may result in a lower intake of fruit or vegetables.

This can be worrying but usually causes no harm.

It is not possible to force children to eat more fruit and vegetables. The best way is for parents to eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day themselves. It may take time, but children learn best by watching their parents and family. So keep trying!

There are many reasons for everyone to enjoy eating a wide variety of vegetables and fruit. Vegetables and fruit provide important vitamins such as Vitamin C and folic acid. They also have other plant substances that are thought important to help prevent some diseases. Remember that any amount is better than none!

How many fruit and vegetables?

All Australians are encouraged to eat two fruit and five vegetables each day, but most children and adults do not eat this much.

Sometimes children may learn to expect 'tastier' high fat and sugar snack foods instead, or maybe parents give up offering vegetables or fruit because it seems children often leave these on the plate or in the lunchbox.

Remember to **offer** children a **variety** of **fruit and vegetables** every day.

Children's serving sizes may be small, and will depend on age, appetite and activity levels.

Remember that any amount of vegetables and fruit is better than none, and always be on the lookout for ways to include more. Focus on lots of different vegetables and fruit, not the amounts.

How can I get my child to eat enough vegetables and fruit?

The first step is for you to eat and enjoy vegetables and fruit every day.

It is important to keep offering vegetables and fruit in a variety of ways, as children learn to eat what is familiar to them. Never assume that your child dislikes a particular fruit or vegetable; the next time you offer may be the day they decide to try it. Children's tastes do change with age.



The five key steps to success

1. Involvement

- Involve your child in choosing which fruit or vegetables they would like.
- Take your child fruit and vegetable shopping and let them see, smell, and feel the fruit and vegetables with you.
- Ask your child to draw a picture and describe the food to you.
- Let your child help wash and prepare fruit and vegetables. Use this opportunity to explore new colours and shapes.
- Encourage their skills by letting them make a simple salad to serve themselves.
- Count out grapes or berries together into a bowl.
- Grow some vegetables or herbs in the garden or pot. Let your child water and nurture the plant.

2. Enjoyment!

- Remember to enjoy meals together with your children whenever possible. If children see you eating and enjoying a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, they are more likely to join in.
- Sometimes children may prefer their vegetables raw to cooked.
- Children may refuse new foods if mealtimes are stressful, so try and focus on the positives about the meal and avoid arguments.

3. Presentation

- Keep a bowl of fresh fruit handy, and vegetables such as peas, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, and mushrooms in the fridge to grab for a quick snack.

- Make vegetables and fruit look great on the plate. Serve different coloured fruit and vegetables, chop them up for a change, or serve them on a special plate. This doesn't mean you need to make rocket ships or faces, although that can be fun sometimes.
- For reluctant eaters, try a new fruit and vegetable once a week. Keep trying the new food to get used to the taste.

4. Include fruit and vegetables wherever possible

- Include vegetables and fruit in a range of ways, and at most meals and snacks. Many times, vegetables can be part of the meal without children even realising.
- Rather than searching for new recipes, try to increase the variety or amount of vegetables added to your favourite family recipes such as pasta sauce, soup or stir-fries.
- Include vegetables and fruit in snacks too. Try corn on the cob, jacket potato, plain home-made popcorn, cut up vegetables with salsa or yoghurt dips, muffins, pikelets or cakes made with added fruit or vegetables. Enjoy frozen fruit or vegetable segments, skewers of fruit, stewed fruit, fruit crumbles, tinned fruits in juice, fruit salad or a fruit platter.

5. Keep trying

- Children need a chance to learn, or sometimes re-learn, to enjoy fruit and vegetables. Your job is to make them available. Remember that children may need to see a fruit or vegetable ten or more times before they are ready to try it.
- Always include a small serving on children's plates; encourage them to try, but let them decide whether or not to eat.
- Perhaps offer some crunchy, raw vegetables before the main meal, when children are often most hungry.

What type of fruit and vegetables are healthiest?

All vegetables and fruits are healthy! Fruit and vegetables may be any colour, shape, texture or variety. They can be fresh, frozen, tinned, or dried. They may be raw, cooked, steamed, boiled, microwaved, stirfried, or roasted. Variety is most important.

Try to choose different coloured fruit and vegetables, particularly yellow, green and red. Some of these examples are melon, carrot, pumpkin, stone fruit, broccoli, spinach, leafy greens and tomato.

What about?

Fruit juices?

Fruit juices are not necessary. It is better to eat fruit instead and have a thirst-quenching glass of water. Fruit juices may be a good source of some vitamins, but the downside is they are high in natural sugars and low in fibre.

Potato chips and crisps?

Chips and crisps are made from potatoes, but are prepared by cooking in oil. They are high in fat and salt, and best eaten only occasionally.

Fruit bars/straps?

These usually contain some fruit, but are also very high in sugar, low in fibre and stick to children's teeth so are best avoided. Children may enjoy a fresh fruit platter or frozen fruit pieces if offered instead.

Pesticides?

Research shows that the amount of pesticides on fresh vegetables and fruit is low and considered safe, even in very young children and breastfeeding mothers. All vegetables and fruit do need to be washed before eating.

Frozen and tinned?

When vegetables and fruit are out of season and more expensive, save money by using frozen, tinned or dried vegetables and fruit. These have vitamin contents similar to fresh products.

Choking on raw vegetables and fruit?

Toddlers and young children can enjoy raw fruit and vegetables. Children should always be seated and supervised while eating all foods, including chopped raw fruit, vegetables and all 'hard' foods.

Important tips to encourage children to eat fruit and vegetables

- Eat and enjoy a variety of fruit and vegetables yourself.
- Focus on serving lots of different vegetables and fruit, not the amounts.
- Try and offer fruit and vegetables at each meal and snack.
- Involve children in decisions about vegetables and fruit.
- Keep offering fruit and vegetables even when children seem to avoid eating them.
- Remember to praise your child for healthy eating.

For more information about child nutrition visit:

www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au