Sneaking in Vegetables

Eat your vegetables! If getting your child to eat vegetables is a struggle, you’re in good company. Although a child should eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, it can be a real challenge to get them down. This challenge becomes even harder for children with special needs who have difficulties with textures and chewing.

Different Veggies, Different Nutrients

All fruits and vegetables were not created equal. For best nutrition, your child’s five or more daily servings should include a variety.

At least one serving should provide vitamin A, which is found in greens (spinach, mustard and other greens) and in orange fruits and vegetables (such as pumpkin, mango, cantaloupe, carrots, squash, and sweet potatoes). Another serving should be rich in vitamin C. Excellent sources include citrus fruits, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, strawberries, mango, papaya, spinach, and peppers. Other important nutrients supplied by fruits and vegetables include B-complex vitamins, calcium, iron, trace elements, and fiber.

So how do you get all this nutrition inside your child? Here are some sneaky ideas to help you smuggle in vegetables.

Superhero Surprise

Whenever you are making a meal with ground beef or turkey, try this: add one cup of vegetable, steamed and pureed, to each pound of ground meat. Since spinach was Popeye’s favorite, try this and other veggies out on your superhero. This works great in burgers, spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna, and casseroles.

Casserole Camouflage

Any time you make a casserole, go ahead and add a cup of finely diced vegetables. If you are using a tomato sauce, puree the vegetables into the tomato sauce for real camouflage power.
Feeding & Nutrition

Veggie Spread
1 bag (10 ounces) frozen green beans, french-cut
2 carrots
1 small eggplant
2 medium zucchini
1 medium tomato
1/4 cup chopped onion
2 cloves garlic
1/2 cup tomato paste
8 ounces tomato sauce
1 teaspoon basil
1 teaspoon oregano
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Finely chop all vegetables and place into a baking dish. Mix tomato paste, sauce, spices, and oil together in bowl. Spread sauce mixture over vegetables and cook at 350° for 1 1/4 hours. Cool in the refrigerator and serve as a cold spread for crackers or bread and on top of other vegetables.

Easter Bunny “Eggs”
1 cup grated carrots
3 ounces cream cheese
1 tablespoon plain yogurt
1/2 cup jack cheese

Blend cheeses and yogurt with electric beater. Mix in carrots. Chill in the refrigerator. Shape into round eggs. Hippity hop to the refrigerator and store until ready to serve.

Pancakes Plus

Only you need to know what the “plus” is. This sneaky idea works great for muffins and breads, too!

1 zucchini, diced
1/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 beaten egg
1 cup milk (the type depends on your child’s needs)
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Steam and puree zucchini. Combine with the other ingredients. Mix until blended but still slightly lumpy. Pour batter over hot griddle and flip once. For a healthy change from syrup, try topping with fruit yogurt, peanut butter, or applesauce.

Dippity Do’s

Snacks are a great time to offer vegetables. Make sure your child can safely handle these textures. Steaming these veggies will help soften them up for easier chewing. Add a favorite dip for extra fun. Some “dippers” are:

- celery stalks
- cauliflowerettes
- broccoli pieces
- bell pepper strips
- zucchini wheels
- cucumber circles
- carrot sticks

These vegetables taste great plain or spiffed up with toppings. Choose toppings that fit into your child’s dietary plan. Some to try include the Veggie Spread described earlier, deviled egg spread, peanut butter, cream cheese, and yogurt.

Fondue Fun: Kids have such fun dipping into the two fondues below, they forget they are eating vegetables.

Hot Broccoli Fondue

1 package (10 ounces) frozen broccoli
3/4 cup cottage cheese
3/4 cup plain yogurt
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder