

veggie dearth: how to get more veggies in your kids

I can't tell you how many mothers ask me how to get their kids to eat more vegetables. So far, I've never heard a mom complain that her kids eat too many vegetables. Fruits are usually not a big challenge to inspire kids, but something in the greenness of veggies can send even the most easy-going of kids on a food fast.

Our government says relatively little about vegetables...or health in general, for that matter. A few years ago, we were asked to "Strive for Five," suggesting that we consume at least 5 servings of fruit and veggies daily. That number has since been upped, and now studies recommend between 5 and 9 servings of fruits and veggies EVERY DAY. Unfortunately, in many families, Mama is happy with even one green thing a week. Given what we know about cancer, diabetes, and obesity, however, limited veggie intake should be taken seriously.

It's a challenge to sneak veggies past a resistant kid. And nobody likes to fight about food. Anyway, studies show that extra "energy" in either direction—"Good, Mary, you're eating your broccoli!" or "If you don't finish your broccoli then X"—will cause an adverse response later on. So I recommend acting "food neutral," where possible.

Sometimes adding vegetables requires some strategic thinking. Following are five ways to start "creatively disbursing" vegetables into your kids' diets.

Start first thing in the morning.

We often have "dragon eyeballs" (AKA, peas) in our morning eggs. Tomato wedges can be the smile of some happy morning breakfast creature. And avocado chunks are daringly appealing to a five-year-old when renamed "dinosaur bugars." (Embarrassingly, but with great success, I throw all dignity out the window for the sake of increasing vegetable intake!)

Another morning trick is to add parsley (high in chlorophyll) or basil to eggs. To make this actually possible in a morning schedule, I keep the herbs—washed and chopped by my food processor—in a glass jar in the freezer. When I need a teaspoon or two, all I have to do is grab a spoonful from my freezer. If your kid is salt-crazy, this trick offers the additional benefit of reducing the need for salt. Besides reducing sodium intake, this green fleck trick does a couple other important things: First, it will get your kids used to seeing green in their food (a psychologically important feat). And second, it will subtly add vital nutrients to every dish!

Serve lots of soups. They can be quite inexpensive; they're easy to make (especially if you use pre-made stock...all you have to do is add canned beans, like garbanzos, and some chopped up veggies, and in 10 minutes, you're there); they're easy to freeze (and I'm a huge proponent of homemade frozen food as

your own form of fast food); and, finally, you can cut the veggies up so small—grate them, if you have to—that your veggie-dodgers will prove unsuccessful in their attempts to de-vegetize their soup.

Add sweet potatoes, carrots, celery, or extra onions to your beans. I frequently use my pressure cooker for economical, fast bean dishes. When I toss sweet potato chunks in a pot, by the time the beans are done, the sweet potato has “disappeared,” leaving added fiber and carotene, and a slightly sweet taste to the dish.

Grow veggie gardeners. Studies show that kids who participate in growing vegetables are more likely to eat them. Let your kids plant a few seeds this summer in a pot, and watch for yourself. Some of the best “pot crops” are: carrots, cucumbers, peppers, small potatoes, squash, and tomatoes.

Article written by Austin mom, Kelly Corbet, founder and writer for www.smartfoodhealthykids.com.