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More Broccoli, Please!
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More Broccoli, Please!

Helping kids like vegetables

Parents and children seem to have more struggles over vegetables than any other kind of food. Offer vegetables in the same matter-of-fact way you offer all other foods.

Remember that **PARENTS** are responsible for:

- Providing meals and snacks.
- Offering a variety of foods. Include foods from at least three of the food groups on the food guide pyramid at each meal and snack.
- Helping children wash their hands before eating.
- Providing a comfortable place to eat with utensils that fit your child's skills.
- Recognizing that children grow and develop at their own rates and that appetites vary from day-to-day or meal-to-meal.
- Setting a good example.

CHILDREN are responsible for:

- Deciding how much to eat.
- Choosing which foods to eat.
- Deciding to eat or not to eat. Don't force your child to eat anything. Forcing results in power struggles that nobody wins!

Start vegetables in infancy. Talk to your doctor or WIC program staff person about how and when to begin solid foods. Add one new food at a time. Give the new food for five days in a row. After five days, introduce a new food. This gives your baby time to adjust to the new food.

More pointers on encouraging children to eat vegetables.

1. Offer positive encouragement for trying new foods.
2. Teach your child how to politely turn down a food.
3. Serve small portions. For example, put just one or two tablespoons of a food on your 2-year-old's plate. Your child can ask for second helpings. This way your child will not feel overwhelmed, and you will not waste a lot of food.
4. Plan meals and snacks so your child has an appetite when at the table. Toddlers and preschoolers need regular meals and snack times, spaced 2 or 3 hours apart.
5. Serve vegetables often. Try various ways of preparing them.
6. Pay attention to the texture and color of cooked vegetables. Many children like them cooked crisp-tender, not mushy. Overcooked vegetables lose their bright attractive color.
7. Serve vegetables, whenever possible, as "finger foods." Cut food into small pieces a child can man-

age successfully. Even cooked vegetables can be eaten this way.

8. Serve salad ingredients as a vegetable/fruit tray. Experiment with dips.
9. A vegetable might seem more fun if it is served at snack time.
10. Let your child help choose and prepare vegetables (see back of page).
11. Find out what your child eats at child care, the neighbor's or Grandma's house. A vegetable you never considered serving might be one of your child's favorites.
12. Respect your child's individuality. Some children are more cautious about trying new foods. Everyone has unique likes and dislikes.
13. Don't take food refusals personally.
14. Resist making statements such as "he doesn't like cabbage" or "she won't eat anything green."
15. Make sure cooked vegetables are not served too hot.

More Broccoli, Please!

CAN I HELP?

When you go to the grocery store, involve your child in selecting vegetables. Ask:

- Which broccoli is greenest? Let's buy that one, then!
- Help me count out four potatoes.
- Please hold the bag as I fill it with Brussels sprouts.
- Do you see something that looks juicy (or crunchy, or shiny)?
- How should we cook this?

Let your child choose a vegetable for a meal. You might want to offer a choice, such as: "Which should we have, white potatoes or sweet potatoes?"

At home in the kitchen a toddler can:

- Pick peas out of pods.
- Help rinse vegetables.
- Put prepared ingredients into a salad bowl or soup pot.
- Set the table with spoons.

A preschooler can:

- Stuff celery.
- Measure and pour.
- Mix and stir.
- Shuck corn.
- Snap green beans.
- Tear lettuce leaves.
- Break off florets of cauliflower.
- Use a potato peeler, with close supervision.

A REMINDER ABOUT CHOKING



Children develop the motor skills involved in chewing and swallowing at different rates. Each child is ready to progress from soft, pureed food to more texture at his own rate. A child can choke on any food, especially if her mouth is full. Be especially cautious of these foods:

- Round, smooth foods such as grapes, hot dogs and cheese.
- Marshmallows.
- Raw, hard fruits and vegetables.
- Peanut butter.
- Cheese spread.
- Hard candy.
- Popcorn.
- Nuts.

Suggestions for making these foods safer:

- Children should sit during meals and snacks.
- Encourage children to take small bites and chew well.
- Cut grapes, hot dogs, cheese and marshmallows into small pieces and offer one piece at a time.
- Cook hard fruits and vegetables, peel and remove seeds, and slice thinly or chop.
- Spread peanut butter or cheese spread very thinly on bread or crackers.
- Do not offer hard candy, popcorn or nuts.
- Turn off the TV and limit other distractions.
- Eat with your children. Keep meal times calm, with quiet talking.

INFORMATION

Information in this bulletin is based on *More Broccoli, Please* (MSU Extension, 1994).



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