



By: Jessica Fisher

VEG OUT!

While dieticians and nutrition experts vary in their opinions about different aspects of food, they all agree on how vital fruits and vegetables are to good health. But, convincing children that eating vegetables is a good thing is a challenge that mothers have faced since the dawn of time. After some thinking I came up with at least eight ways to make produce easier for my kids to swallow.

Stock up on fruits and veggies whenever there are good deals. Not only will the low price allow you to buy more, but if the kids don't eat everything on their plates, you won't feel so bad letting something go to waste. (Sad, but true.) Buy what's in season to ensure quality and a fair price. If you find a low price on a new-to-you vegetable, that's a good time to try it as well. Just don't buy a ton of something you're not sure the kids will go for – or you might be eating quite a lot of asparagus on your own.

Provide a bottomless fruits and veggie tray. If you

can keep a platter stocked with sliced vegetables and fruits, you will find that the kids tend to eat more. Bring it out at snack time and during dinner preparation. It's amazing how much they'll munch when they're hungry and there aren't less nutritious snacks around.

Find quick ways to prep your produce. There are the obvious convenience solutions such as buying baby carrots and prepared veggie trays. But, you can quickly cut an apple if you slice around the core instead of through it. The same holds true for bell peppers and peaches. There might be a slight extra waste that heads to the compost pile, but if more is getting eaten, it's a fair tradeoff.

Let the kids help. Kids are more likely to eat what they've helped prepare. Plus, you're giving them a life skill: food preparation. (See the sidebar for some recipe suggestions.)

Cook vegetables in a pleasing manner. While covering



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vegetables in a cheesy sauce defeats the purpose of feeding your family healthier food, there's no harm in preparing them in a new and fresh way. Add sautéed garlic and a little olive oil to steamed veggies in order to boost their flavor. Drizzle on a little lemon juice. Seek out recipes that focus on the fresh vegetables. A little extra work on side dishes may make them more palatable.

Disguise it. There are a handful of cookbooks out there that focus on the idea of hiding vegetables and vegetable puree in kid-friendly recipes. Brownies made with spinach? Or cauliflower slipped into mashed potatoes? It can be done – and with great success. One great place to start is to beef up, or should we say “beet up” your baking? Vegetables and fruits can easily be incorporated into your regular muffin or quick bread recipes. Consider stirring in canned pumpkin, applesauce or baby food plums in the place of some of the sugar and oil in a regular recipe. You may find that your family prefers this healthier boost.

Make it fancy. In catering, there's a mantra: “presentation is everything.” While it may not be absolutely everything, the presentation of a dish matters. Take a few extra minutes to section the grapefruit with a knife, cutting away the peel

and pith and removing it from the membranes. There's a whole lot of love in that five minute operation and it makes eating the grapefruit more of a pleasurable experience. Think of ways to arrange salads or serving dishes in a way that is pleasing to the eye. It will be more fun to eat.

Visit the source. Whether you plant your own garden, shop at the local farmer's market, or visit a nearby farm, kids will be more excited about the foods they eat if they know where they came from. Plus, the fresher the food, the better it will taste. Ever eaten a homegrown tomato? There's no comparison between those and the mealy, mushy globes you find at the grocery store.

You can lead a child to veggies, but you can't make him eat. Unfortunately, you can't force a child to embrace what you know is good for him. But, you can provide healthy options and teach him about making good food choices. Be consistent. Provide options and reduce his access to junk food. If you're excited about good healthy food, eventually your kids will catch your enthusiasm. Your mother would be proud!

Jessica Fisher is a wife, mother, and freelance writer, making her home near San Diego. She regularly writes about fun, frugality, and the pursuit of a clean house at www.lifeasmom.com ++



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