

Parents need help to get children to eat their vegetables

By Karen Kingham, Rafferty's Garden dietitian

Vegetables are the food group that provides a constant source of frustration to parents, and recent Australian research reveals they definitely have cause to complain.

Results from the 2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity survey shows that less than a quarter of young children are meeting vegetable intake recommendations of more than 2-4 serves a day.

What's more the situation worsens when you remove potatoes, falling to 5% among 2-3 year olds and 3 % among 4-8 year olds.

One serve of vegetables is half a cup of cooked vegetables or one cup of salad.

Research prepared by the CSIRO and the University of SA updates our knowledge on what Australian children are eating. The last time this was done at a national level was in 1995 as part of the National Nutrition Survey.

This most recent survey is the first to look at food intake, weight and physical activity in the one group of people. Over 4000 children from 2-16 years from across Australia were sampled.

Putting the effort in with nutrition early can pay off in later years. Dietitian Karen Kingham shares her tips for getting your children to eat more vegetables

1. Be a great role model: let your children see you eat and enjoy a wide variety of vegetables. Research shows when mum and dad make the effort to eat more vegetables they're more likely to succeed in getting their children to do so too.
2. Don't give up: keep putting veggies on the plate. Many children need to be familiar with foods before they will eat them so they need to see them often, see you eat them regularly and if you can get them to have a little taste you are almost there.
3. Step back, relax: avoid applying pressure to eat vegetables; it only makes children associate them with unpleasantness. And this may last a lifetime – a US study found college students who were forced to eat certain foods as children would still avoid them if they had the choice.
4. Think outside the square: vegetables don't just have to be cooked and served up with a meal. Raw or lightly steamed vegetables (think cucumber, snow peas, carrot, cauliflower, broccoli) make a great snack to dip into mashed avocado, cream cheese or a smooth vegetable puree (such as Rafferty's Garden's Sweet Potato, Carrot and Apple Puree).
5. Lay a great foundation: introduce your baby to a wide variety of veggies from the moment they are ready. In doing so you lay a solid foundation for their relationship with vegetables in the future.
6. Go the smorgasbord: once your child can wield a spoon they will love to serve them selves. And even if fingers are the utensil of the day, put the vegetables on the table and let everyone help them selves.
7. Sneak them in: everyone has a favourite sneaky vegetable dish, be it grated vegetables in a bolognaise sauce or using pureed vegetables as a quick pasta sauce (try Rafferty's Garden Organic Super Hero Beetroot and Sweet Potato Medley)
8. Pull out your green thumb: it doesn't matter if you have a balcony or only a window sill, there is sure to be a vegetable or herb you could grow. Research shows many children can't resist the temptation of sampling home-grown produce.

9. Start a compost or worm farm: young children will always be a source of wasted food, particularly vegetables. As you scrape half a plate of good food into your compost bin be reassured that whilst it won't be nourishing your child it will nourish your garden.
10. Keep it simple: plain cooking styles are best for young children and for your own emotional state. The disappointment you feel when your child won't eat what you have prepared is always directly proportional to the effort you put in.

When it's hard to get into the kitchen to prepare nutritious meals with lots of veggies, Rafferty's Garden is there to help. With a half to over two serves of vegetables per pack, made from 100% natural ingredients and absolutely nothing else, Rafferty's Garden takes the 'con' out of convenience.

Reference

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