

When your child does not eat vegetables

Vegetables can be challenging for kids to eat because children have more taste buds than adults and are more sensitive to the stronger flavours in some vegetables.



Children generally prefer crisp and crunchy foods and dislike foods with a soft or mushy texture such as cooked spinach and mushrooms. They may be more accepting of fruit, tomato sauce and mild-tasting vegetables such as corn, potatoes and raw cucumbers.

Your child may be eating more vegetables than you think! Take a close look at what your child is eating over a few days.

Vegetables are important!

Vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A, vitamin C and folate. Researchers are discovering more and more how important fruits and vegetables are to our health.

Canada's Food Guide recommends children aged two to eight years old have 4 to 5 servings from the Vegetables and Fruit group each day.

One Food Guide Serving is equal to:

- ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables
- 1 cup leafy raw vegetables
- 1 fruit or ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen or canned fruit
- ½ cup (125 mL) 100% juice

Good to know

Since children's stomachs are small, you can divide one Food Guide Serving into smaller servings throughout the day.

Tips to increase your child's interest in eating vegetables

- Stay calm and do not force or beg your child to eat vegetables
- Cut vegetables into small ½ to 1 centimetre (1/4 inch) bite-sized pieces
- Offer small servings of vegetables at each meal (1-2 tablespoons), but do not insist that your child eat them
- Set an example by eating vegetables yourself
- Let your child help choose and prepare vegetables



Vegetables and choking

Hard and round pieces of raw vegetables such as carrots can be a choking hazard for children under four years of age. See our fact sheet *Choking prevention tips* for more information www.york.ca/nutrition.

Make vegetables interesting!

Raw vegetable ideas

- Serve tortilla roll-ups spread with cream cheese and grated carrot
- Serve fresh green or yellow beans, baby carrots or snow peas
- Stuff celery sticks with salmon salad or peanut butter
- Serve vegetables with dip such as salad dressing, hummus, plum sauce or ketchup

Cooked vegetable ideas

- Cook vegetables in chicken, beef or vegetable broth instead of water for added flavour
- Add a sprinkle of brown sugar, orange juice, nutmeg and cinnamon to cooked squash, sweet potatoes or canned pumpkin purée
- Try making baked veggie fries (see *Cooking up some fun* for the recipe www.york.ca/nutrition). Serve with ketchup or plum sauce to dip
- Flavour cooked vegetables by adding one of the following:
 - Grated cheese such as cheddar, mozzarella or Parmesan
 - Herbs and spices (e.g., tarragon, cumin, mustard seed, basil)
 - Low sodium soya sauce

Good to know

If your child does not eat vegetables but eats fruit, they will still get the nutrients they need.



Ideas for adding vegetables to recipes

Finely chop, grate or use the blender or food processor to mince or purée vegetables into recipes. This is a way to add more nutrients and flavour to the recipe to benefit the whole family. Here are a few ideas:

- Add grated or finely chopped carrots to salmon or chicken salad
- Add grated or finely chopped vegetables to casseroles, chili, stews, quiche, stir fries or lasagne
- Add finely chopped, minced or puréed vegetables to omelettes, pasta sauce, macaroni and cheese, frittatas or dhal
- Add grated carrots or zucchini to muffin, pancake or waffle batter
- Add grated carrots or zucchini into hamburgers, meatballs or meatloaf
- Make vegetable soups with small vegetable pieces or purée



Offer the same foods to the whole family

Don't cater to your child or get up from the table to make special foods if your child won't eat. The harder you work to make special foods for your child, the more pressure you may put on them to eat. When children feel pressured to eat, they generally react by eating less.