



# Healthy Choices

## Start Now



# When Your Child Does Not Eat Vegetables

### Why it is important to eat vegetables

- They help keep the body healthy by providing vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A, vitamin C and folate.
- Vegetables are a good source of fibre.
- Vegetables are rich in phytochemicals, which help lower risk of cancer.



### Why children may not like vegetables

- Children generally prefer crisp and crunchy foods and dislike foods with a soft or mushy texture. Cook vegetables until tender-crisp.\*
- Children are more sensitive to the stronger flavours in some vegetables.

Children may be more accepting of fruit and mild-tasting vegetables such as corn, carrots, green and yellow beans and potatoes.

#### Food Safety Tip:

Before eating vegetables and fruit, always wash them under cool running water, even if you plan to peel them.

*\*Cook vegetables to a texture your child can chew and swallow safely.*

**Canada's food guide** recommends making half of our food choices each day from the vegetables and fruits food grouping.



Offer a vegetable or fruit at every meal and snack.

- Offer vegetables more often than fruits.
- Offer a variety of different coloured vegetables each day.
- Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables can be healthy choices.
- Buy fresh vegetables in season and freeze some to eat at another time.
- Choose canned vegetables with little or no sodium and drain and rinse before serving.
- Offer a variety of raw\* and cooked vegetables each day.

### Prevent Choking

Hard, round raw vegetables such as carrot coins can be a choking risk for children under four years of age.

- Hard vegetables and fruit should be cooked and cut into small pieces.
- Peel fruit and remove pits and seeds.
- Grapes should be cut in half or quarters and seeds removed.

For more information, see the **Choking Prevention Tips** fact sheet.

## Tips to encourage your child to eat vegetables

- Offer vegetables at meal and snack times when your child is hungry. Let your child decide how much to eat.
- Offer a new vegetable on a regular basis.
- You may need to offer a new vegetable 15 or more times before your child will eat it.
- Be patient; do not force or beg your child to eat.
- Offer small portions (15-30 mL or one to two tablespoons) of vegetables at a time; they can always have more.
- Let your child help choose the vegetables. Your young child can help prepare vegetables by washing them. Older children can help peel them.
- Set a good example - eat vegetables yourself.

**Add vegetables to recipes** to add more nutrients and flavour to food. Finely chop or grate vegetables by hand, a blender or food processor. The whole family will benefit.

It is important to continue to offer vegetables on their own to your child, even if you add them to other foods! This will help them learn the taste and texture of individual vegetables.

## Here are a few ideas:

- Grate carrots into tuna or chicken salad.
- Grate or cut-up vegetables into casseroles, pasta sauce, macaroni and cheese, lasagna, omelettes, quiche, soups, frittatas, stir fries, chili, stews, dhal, tortilla wraps or pita bread.
- Add grated carrots or zucchini into muffin, pancake or waffle batter.
- Put frozen, chopped spinach into hamburgers, meatballs or meatloaf.

## Make vegetables interesting

### Raw vegetable ideas:

- Chop or slice vegetables into different shapes and sizes.
- Serve vegetables of different colours – it may encourage your child to try new vegetables.
- Serve fresh green or yellow beans, baby carrots or snow peas as a snack.
- Stuff celery sticks with cottage cheese, peanut/nut/soy butter or tuna salad.
- Serve vegetables with dip such as hummus or plain yogurt.

### Cooked vegetable ideas:

- Cook vegetables in low-sodium chicken, beef or vegetable stock instead of water for added flavour.
- Add a sprinkle of nutmeg and cinnamon to cooked mashed squash, sweet potatoes or canned pumpkin purée.
- Make vegetable soups with either small vegetable pieces or purée.
- Flavour cooked vegetables by adding one of the following:
  - Grated cheese such as low-fat\*, low-sodium cheddar, parmesan, or mozzarella
  - Fresh or dried herbs such as thyme and basil
  - Homemade salsa
- \* Offer full-fat dairy products to children under two years of age.

For nutrition information and to find out if your child (18 months to five years) is a healthy eater using Nutri-eSTEP, go to [www.nutritionscreen.ca](http://www.nutritionscreen.ca).

If you have questions about Nutri-eSTEP or about your child's eating, call Telehealth Ontario to talk to a Registered Dietitian at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007).



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