

When your child refuses to eat vegetables

Vegetables are important

Vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A, vitamin C and folate. Vitamins and minerals are important for keeping the body healthy.

Canada's Food Guide recommends children aged two to eight have 4 to 5 Food Guide Servings of Vegetables and Fruit each day.

One Food Guide Serving equals:

- 1 medium vegetable or fruit
- ½ cup fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit
- ½ cup cooked leafy vegetables
- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables
- ½ cup 100% vegetable or fruit juice



One Food Guide Serving can be divided into smaller servings throughout the day.

A few reasons why children may dislike vegetables

- Children have more taste buds than adults and are more sensitive to stronger flavours in some vegetables. Children may be more accepting of fruit and mild-tasting vegetables such as corn and potatoes
- Children generally prefer crisp and crunchy foods and dislike foods with a soft or mushy texture, such as cooked asparagus, spinach and mushrooms

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



Prevent choking

Hard and round pieces of raw vegetables such as carrot coins can be a choking hazard for children under four years of age. If your child is less than four years, refer to the *Choking prevention tips for parents* fact sheet.

Tips to encourage your child to eat vegetables

- Stay calm and do not force or beg your child to eat vegetables
- Offer small servings of vegetables at each meal (1-2 tbsp), but do not insist that your child eat them
- Set an example by eating vegetables yourself
- Let your child help prepare vegetables



Make vegetables interesting

Raw vegetable ideas

- Chop or slice vegetables into different shapes and sizes
- Serve tortilla roll-ups spread with cream cheese and grated carrot
- Serve fresh green/yellow beans, baby carrots or snow peas as a snack
- Stuff celery sticks with cottage cheese, peanut butter or tuna salad
- Serve vegetables with dip such as Ranch dressing, hummus, plum sauce or ketchup

Parent-child teamwork tip

Remember to avoid making foods seem special and offer them to the whole family in the same way. 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.

Cooked vegetable ideas

- Cook vegetables in chicken, beef or vegetable stock instead of water for added flavour
- Add a sprinkle of brown sugar, orange juice, nutmeg and cinnamon to cooked mashed squash, sweet potatoes or canned pumpkin puree
- Try making baked veggie fries (refer to the *Cooking up some fun* booklet for the recipe). Serve with ketchup or plum sauce to dip
- Make vegetable soups with either small vegetable pieces or purée
- Flavour cooked vegetables by adding one of the following:
 - grated cheese such as cheddar, mozzarella, or Parmesan
 - fresh herbs (thyme, tarragon, rosemary, dill, parsley or basil)
 - low sodium soya sauce
 - lemon or orange juice
 - salsa

Add vegetables to recipes

Use the blender, food processor or grater to mince, purée or grate 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:

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