

Vegetables are often the hardest food to get children to enjoy, yet they are one of the most important. Whilst being a major source of vitamins, minerals and fibre they are also an important source of disease fighting antioxidants and phytonutrients.

So why are they just so hard for children to eat?

Most often children will object to vegetables due to their strong distinctive tastes or for being too chewy and stringy. By mixing them with bland (and familiar) foods or using them in such a way that removes the texture then children can start to appreciate the flavour of vegetables which will help to encourage their developing palate.



There is nothing wrong with hiding or 'disguising' the flavour or texture of healthy foods in appropriate dishes as it helps to ensure a balanced diet. However healthy foods hidden in "sometimes foods" such as sweets, cakes or deep-fried foods are NOT advised. This can lead to mixed messages for children. For example, on the one hand, chocolate cake "with hidden zucchini" is happily encouraged yet, on the other hand, a different chocolate cake at a party which looks and tastes the same as the other chocolate cake is considered a "sometimes food". Very confusing for a 3-year-old! This practice can also encourage an overly sweet tooth at a time when we should be trying to expand on the variety of flavours exposed to children.

Whilst 'disguising' vegetables is a useful way to ensure vegetables are being eaten by an otherwise picky eater, it is still important that children are regularly offered vegetables in their whole form so they will eventually learn to enjoy them. Also remember to be a good role model by regularly eating vegetables yourself!

10 easy ways to add more vegies to the menu:

1. Add a layer or two of spinach or silver beet to lasagne
2. Add some frozen vegetables to the mix when making meatloaf or rissoles – better still grate zucchini, carrot and pumpkin into the mix and the little "vegie detectives" won't find them!
3. Roasted vegetables can be blended and strained into a basic tomato sauces to use with spaghetti, pasta and meatballs or try it as topping on pizza bases.
4. Cooked pumpkin, corn, zucchini, carrot and potato can be creamed and added to savoury muffins, pies, quiches or baked into scones, scrolls or homemade breads.



5. When making mashed potato, mash in some steamed cauliflower, parsnip or pumpkin.
6. Stuff baked potatoes with baked beans or creamed corn. Top with grated cheese.
7. Add grated zucchini and mashed cauliflower to the cheese sauce when making macaroni cheese. For the “green vegie detectives” out there, try peeling the zucchini first.
8. Turn ordinary pikelets into vegie pikelets – add grated zucchini, chopped spring onion, creamed corn and grated cheese to pikelet mixture. They will take a little longer to cook through than pikelets but are much healthier and tastier.
9. Make oven-baked vegetable chips: slice potatoes, carrots, sweet potato, parsnips or beetroot. Pat dry with paper towel and spray lightly with oil before baking at 200°C.
10. Make some tasty noodle fritters by adding egg, peas, corn, grated zucchini and grated cheese to cooked 2 minute noodles. Cook in frying pan in small portions. These make a great afternoon tea snack.

