

What are the secrets to raising a veggie lover?

When do we learn to love vegetables? For most of us, it is usually before the age of seven. During the first six years of life children are in a sensitive period of learning that involves refining the senses, which includes, of course, taste and smell.

Introduce new foods ten times. Presenting a variety of vegetables to the young child helps create a later preference for vegetables in the older child and adult. When introducing a new vegetable, we need to be patient. It takes about ten presentations of a dish for a child to learn to like it. When introducing a new vegetable, consider serving it two or three times a week for at least five weeks, in order for your child to gain an appreciation for the flavor. Remember, repetition and patience is needed when introducing new foods.

Be aware of food sensitivities. We need to be aware that the reason our children may be reluctant



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Kids Talk™

to try new foods could be due to an allergy or sensitivity. My four-year-old sister refused to eat anything with tomatoes in it. Spaghetti with red sauce produced a ring-tailed hissy fit. Come to find out years later, my sister is highly allergic to tomatoes, along with other foods she refused to eat as a child. Be tuned in to the fact that your child's long-term refusal to eat a certain



food may be the body's way of saying, "No, this really isn't good for me."

Kids prefer crunchy vegetables.

Be careful not to overcook vegetables. Raw or lightly steamed are children's favorite vegetable presentation. Youngsters love to dip veggies in dressings or sauces. Ranch dressing is a perennial favorite. Try homemade yogurt- or tofu-based dips flavored with soy sauce, wasabi, peanut butter, or avocado. Try olive oil and balsamic vinegar as a dipping sauce. Black bean dip or hummus are tasty with slices of cucumber or zucchini. Veggies wrapped up with dressing in a tortilla make a healthy burrito.

Be a good example. If you want your children to eat more vegetables, set the standard by piling your plate high.

Give your children some hands-on experiences. Plant a garden, shop at a farmers market, go to a u-pick farm, and let the kids help in the kitchen. A child selected and hand-



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shucked roasted ear of corn with melted butter from the farmers market is sure to create epicurean excitement.

Use fun or off-limits serving dishes. Serve veggies or a salad as a first course in ice cream sundae or banana split dishes. Serve veggies and dip shrimp-cocktail style with ice in a long stemmed glass. Have fun and be adventurous with your trips into veggie-ville.

Keep in mind this child-rearing paradox that applies to not just vegetables, but the most trying situations. When you think your children will never eat a vegetable again, suddenly that's all they want to do.

Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 25 years experience working with young children and is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents. Contact her via e-mail at maren@kidstalknews.

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