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Family Matters

Improving Health Together

March 2020 Newsletter

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Learn to Enjoy Vegetables with a Fun Family Activity

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March is National Nutrition Month, however, every day of the year needs nutritious foods. In children, vitamins and minerals from vegetables help with brain development, proper growth, and overall health. If only this explanation was enough to convince a child to eat their veggies, life would be so much easier! However, any parent can tell you, when their child makes a food choice, nutritional value is rarely top priority. To be fair, adults can be just as guilty in letting taste guide their food choices.

How Taste and Texture Influence Food Choices

With the knowledge that taste strongly influences our food choices, how do we strike a balance between healthy and flavorful? First, let us understand why kids typically do not like vegetables.



1. Our sense of taste is strongest when we are young. Our tongue is able to sense five flavors. These flavors are sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami (think earthy). Sweet and salty are most preferred, while bitter is the least preferred. Ironically, the bitter flavor in vegetables is caused by the same nutrients making vegetables healthy.

2. Texture. The hardness of vegetables can be less appealing than soft foods, such as bread. These preferences do not have to become a barrier to eating vegetables. Through a few, simple modifications, we can create balance between good health and good taste.

Cooking Techniques to Make Vegetables Less Bitter

- Add sour flavors to reduce bitter. After cooking, squirt fresh lemon juice on veggies.
- Before serving vegetables, add a pinch of coarse ground salt, such as Kosher or sea salt. Kids like the taste and it balances bitter.
- Toss cooked vegetables in a dash of soy sauce, or a miso-honey dressing (see recipe on back).



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Cooking Techniques to Make Vegetables Softer

- Sauté vegetables. Heat pan over medium-high to high heat, then add 1 - 2 teaspoons vegetable oil. When oil looks shimmery, add vegetables and stir often. Remove from heat when vegetables are just beginning to soften, about 3 - 6 minutes. Do not over-cook; a mushy texture can be just as unappealing as hard.

Let's Talk

Are you tired of begging and pleading your kids to eat vegetables? Try something they will naturally engage in: games and experiments. During a food experiment, do your best to avoid judgements (“this is gross or yucky”). Rather, focus on observations (“it tastes like dirt or it is crunchy”). Experiment as a family since role modeling is a part of the game.



Start with a plain vegetable, when kids feel hungry, but not starving.

1. Ask for a detailed description of the vegetable. For example, describe the color and texture.
2. Next, choose one of the five flavors to try. Then, pair that flavor with a veggie of choice. For example, steamed broccoli with lemon juice. How did the taste change? Which flavor do they prefer?
3. Finally, combine flavors and texture. Try a bite of the plain vegetable, cooked or raw, with brown rice. Now add a flavor, such as soy sauce, to the vegetable and rice. With all three ingredients, how have the tastes and textures changed?
4. Let them lead. Ask what vegetable, or color, they would like to experiment with next.

More experiments to learn about flavor:

1. Before mixing ingredients in the miso-honey dressing, taste each individually to learn about the flavor.
2. Become familiar with the five flavors. Try...
 - *Sour*: grapefruit, apple cider vinegar, 100% cranberry juice, or plain yogurt.
 - *Umami*: tomato paste, mushrooms, or parmesan cheese.
 - *Salt*: capers or pickles.
 - *Bitter*: black tea, coffee, or fresh orange peel.
 - *Sweet*: fruit, bread, unflavored milk, or cinnamon.

Recipes for Health

Miso-Honey Dressing (Try all five flavors in this recipe) Makes about 1/2 cup

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup rice vinegar (= sour)
- 2 tablespoons white miso paste, tahini or sunflower butter (= umami)
- 1/2 teaspoon dried ginger (optional, adds sweet spice)
- 3 tablespoons oil, sesame or vegetable (reduces bitter)
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce (= salty)



- 1 tablespoon honey (= sweet)
- Assortment of bite sized veggies (= bitter)

Preparation:

In a bowl, whisk all ingredients until mixed. Dip or sprinkle on raw or cooked vegetables, or use as a sauce for stir-fry.