

# Parenting the Preschooler

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 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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## Getting Preschoolers to Eat Vegetables

The FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID recommends 3-5 servings of vegetables daily. But, parents wonder, "How do I get my preschooler to eat a variety of vegetables?"

### Factors That Shape Food Habits and Behaviors in Children

**Familiarity.** It takes 8 - 15 tastes before a child says he likes a food. Have the child take only one small bite (one pea or a slice of carrot) the first time. A child may not even try a new food until it has been offered two or three times. Even just putting a tongue on a new food may be all you would expect in introducing a new food. Don't make a big deal over a food. Make it available, and show in a matter-of-fact way that you enjoy eating it, and let the child decide how much to eat.

**Satiety Value.** If you introduce a new food when a child is hungry, you will have a better chance of having the child accept the food. The child will then begin to associate eating that food with eliminating hunger. Parents and care givers should choose the time and place that food will be offered, but the choice of how much to eat should be left to the child.

**Social Context.** Adult attention from parents and care givers encourage good food habits. If you notice that a child is willing to try new foods, you can say, "Kris, I really like the way you are open to trying new foods. That shows your adventurous nature." Avoid rewarding a child for eating all the food, rather focus on their willingness to experiment with new foods. A child may refuse to eat if he's emotionally upset, tired or angry.

**Parent Modeling.** As a parent, you can help your child make healthy food choices by role modeling healthy eating. Serve and eat (even "just a taste") a variety of vegetables.

**Increase Availability.** Make it easy to snack on vegetables. Have them ready-to-eat in easy-to-get-to containers in the refrigerator. A child is much more likely to eat a carrot if it is washed, pared, and sliced.

### Have Preschooler Help Prepare Vegetables

If children participate in the preparation of vegetables, they are more likely to eat the food.

**Let your child help cook!**

### Ways to Get Your Preschooler Involved in Vegetable Preparation

#### Salad Making

Have your preschooler help make a salad or fresh vegetable relish tray. Tasks to give your child might be: tearing lettuce, breaking off cauliflower florets or washing cherry tomatoes. Don't be surprised if you see your helper sampling some veggies during preparation.

#### Vegetable Soup

- ▶ Read the book Stone Soup by Marcia Brown.
- ▶ Take a trip to a garden, farmer's market, or a grocery store to select vegetables for soup. Let your child select the vegetables.
- ▶ Help your preschooler wash the vegetables and prepare them for the soup. The vegetables should

be about the same size so they will cook in about the same time.

- ▶ Heat about two quarts of water in the soup kettle. Remove the pan from the heat and **very carefully** add the vegetables to the soup pot.
- ▶ Cook until the vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes. Season.
- ▶ Enjoy as a snack or lunch.

### Grow Sprouts

Mung beans and soybeans sprout easily. Put some soy or mung beans in a large jar with water. Soak overnight. Drain off water and put in a dark, dry, warm place. Rinse with cool water twice a day. Notice the changes in size, hardness or softness, color, shape. Discuss with your preschooler. The sprouts will be ready to eat in a few days. Try them in a salad, soup, stir fry, or sandwich. (The University of Wisconsin-Extension Publications unit, 630 West Mifflin Street, Room 170, Madison WI 53703, has a publication A3385 *Growing Edible Sprouts at Home* that has complete information on seed selection, growing techniques, and edible sprout storage.)

### Vegetable Serving Size

Remember that a serving for a preschooler is not the same as for an adult. An adult serving is one cup of raw leafy vegetables and one-half cup of other vegetables. A serving for a preschooler is about two-thirds the size of an adult portion or one tablespoon for each year of life.

### Recipe Ideas

#### Vegetable Roll-ups

Spread cream cheese on a flour tortilla. Spread finely chopped raw broccoli and/or cauliflower or shredded carrots on the cheese. Roll up the tortilla. (The flour tortilla can also be used with peanut butter and finely chopped celery and raisins.)

#### Cheesy Dippers

Cook cauliflower or broccoli florets lightly (vegetable should be firm). Cool to room temperature. Heat cheese spread to melt it. Let children dip vegetables in cheese.

### Cucumber Yogurt Dip

- 1 cup (8 ounces) plain yogurt
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 small cucumbers
- 1 cup chopped parsley
- 1 clove garlic, minced or C tsp. garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- A dash of pepper

Blend together yogurt and mayonnaise. Cut cucumbers in half, lengthwise, and remove seeds. Chop finely to measure 1-2 cups. Add cucumber and remaining ingredients to yogurt mixture. Blend thoroughly and chill. Serve with vegetables cut for dipping. Makes about 2 cups.

### Macaroni and Pea Salad

- 2 cups uncooked macaroni
- 1 cup cubed Cheddar cheese
- 1 (15 ounce) can green peas, drained
- ¼ cup green onion, chopped
- ½ cup salad dressing (light and low sodium)
- 1 teaspoon dried dill

Cook macaroni according to package directions. Cool macaroni and combine with peas, cheese, and onions. Gently mix with salad dressing. Sprinkle dried dill on top. Cover and chill. Yield: 4-6 servings.

**"Hiding" vegetables** in foods that your children like is a way to increase the amount of vegetables they eat in a day. Cookies, muffins, and quick breads can be healthy foods. Pumpkin cookies, for example, provide nutrients from vegetables that are not found in sugar cookies. One mother (and Day Care Provider) adds mashed carrots to her meatloaf recipe. Be creative.

#### Sources:

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