
My Toddler Hates Vegetables. What Can I Do?

My 2-year-old used to be a pretty good eater. But now she's going through a phase where she won't even try the vegetables I serve. How can I get more veggies into her mouth and off the floor?

- Mila

As most parents know, there are two things you can't force a child to do: eat and sleep. This is especially true of toddlers, who often assert their independence through eating — or not eating — the foods you put on their plates.

For many toddlers, vegetables come under particular scrutiny. But don't despair — with time and patience, even the most finicky eaters can find several veggies they like (and a few they even love!).

Here are some strategies that might help:

- **Don't give in to a food jag.** Most young children go through phases where they want to eat the same thing day after day. But that doesn't mean you have to oblige. Serving a variety of foods, including vegetables, will encourage your daughter to be more flexible when she's hungry.
 - **If at first you don't succeed, try and try again.** Studies have shown it may take 10 or more tries before a child accepts a new food. Try serving a small portion so it's less overwhelming or consider pairing veggies with something you know she likes.
 - **Avoid nagging, forcing, bargaining, or bribing.** All of these tactics will create power struggles and are doomed to fail in the long run. Just continue offering an array of veggie choices and encourage her to give them a try. Keep mealtime moods upbeat.
 - **Set a good example.** Have family meals together and let your child see you eating a variety of nutritious foods yourself. Also, toddlers are also more likely to eat what their peers are eating, so
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look for opportunities where she can eat healthfully with friends.

- **Involve her in choosing and preparing the vegetables you serve.** For example, she could decide whether you'll have green beans or broccoli tonight, or whether you'll bake zucchini or carrot muffins. She can even wash lettuce and snap green beans. Simple choices will help her feel a sense of control.
- **Make it fun.** Try making a veggie face (like cucumber eyes, tomato nose, green bean mouth, and shredded carrot hair). Toddlers also love dipping, so try serving veggies with yogurt or broccoli with melted cheese.

One thing to keep in mind when serving fresh fruit and veggies: Raw vegetables and hard fruits can be a choking hazard for young children. Be sure to cook them or cut them into small enough pieces so that they don't pose a choking risk.

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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