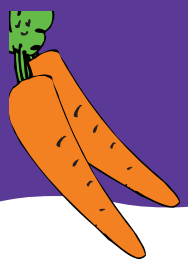
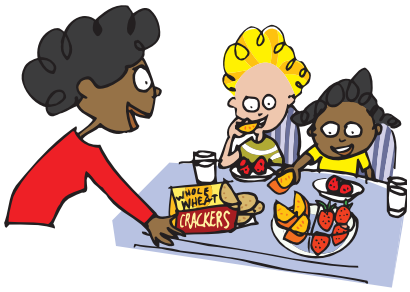


Build a Healthy Plate With Vegetables

Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Brightly colored vegetables can be the "super stars" in every meal and snack! Most children 2 years and older do not eat enough vegetables or a variety of vegetables. You can help by offering a variety of vegetables during the week. Serving vegetables at meals and snacks can:



- **Give children the vitamins and minerals they need to grow and play.**
- **Help children grow at a healthy weight.**
- **Provide dietary fiber to help children feel full and make their "potty time" easier.**
- **Create healthy eating habits children will keep for life.**
- **Add color, crunch, and flavor to children's plates.**

What types of vegetables should I offer?

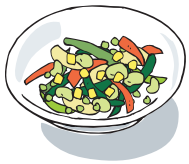
- **Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables are all great choices.** Each vegetable contains different amounts of nutrients and fiber, so vary the vegetables you serve. Providing different choices each day helps children get the nutrition they need.
- **Brighten children's plates often with dark-green, red, and orange vegetables.**
- **Incorporate a variety of dry beans and peas into the meal.** Offer white bean dips or mashed black bean burritos.

CACFP Crediting Tips:

- **Because of their high nutrient content, cooked, mature (dry) beans and peas may be considered both as a vegetable and meat alternate. However, they cannot be credited as both a vegetable and a meat alternate in the same meal. (See the Dry Beans and Peas as well as the Meat and Meat Alternate tip sheets on pages 15 and 19 for more information.)**
- **Some beans and peas, such as lima beans, green peas, snap peas, and green (string) beans, are fresh, immature beans and peas that can be served as "vegetables." They are not "dry beans and peas" in CACFP, and cannot be served as a meat alternate.**

How can I serve a variety of vegetables low in sodium and solid fats?

Since vegetables are naturally low in sodium (salt) and solid fats, prepare and serve vegetables without adding too much salt or solid fats like butter, stick margarine, cream sauces, and regular, full-fat cheese. Here's how:



- **Use herbs or no-salt spice mixes** instead of salt, butter, or stick margarine to season vegetable dishes.
- **Offer fresh vegetables more often** instead of breaded and fried vegetables, including fried white potatoes.

more 'variety' tips on next page ...

... more 'variety' tips

- **Purchase canned vegetables and beans labeled "no salt added" or "low sodium."** If these are not available, reduce sodium by draining and rinsing canned foods before preparing. Choose fat-free refried beans, or reduced-sugar and reduced-sodium versions of baked beans.

- **Use frozen vegetables** that do not contain added solid fats, sugars, or sodium.

- **Go light on the salad dressings,** sauces, and dips.

How can I encourage kids to eat vegetables?

It may take time for new foods to be accepted. Kids don't always eat new foods right away. Here are some ways to get kids excited about vegetables:

- **Add color and texture.** Create a rainbow salad, coleslaw, or stir-fry with a variety of colors of vegetables. Use dark leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce or spinach, and add red peppers, shredded carrots, and red cabbage. Add canned pineapple chunks packed in 100% fruit juice to the salad for some more color.

- **Make food fun.** Serve fresh vegetable sticks (zucchini, yellow squash, celery, red pepper) with "Snow Princess Dip" (low-fat ranch dressing), hummus (puréed chickpeas, olive oil, and lemon juice), or "Alligator Eyelash Dip" (plain, low-fat yogurt mixed with dill or other herbs). Keep cut-up vegetables on hand for a quick appetizer to serve and occupy children while you are getting meals ready.

Eat vegetables and kids will too. They learn from watching you.

- **Cook together.** Provide healthy ingredients and let kids help with preparation, based on their age and skills. Kids may try foods they avoided in the past if they helped to prepare them. Children can help rinse vegetables, mash beans, mix ingredients, or tear leafy greens. *http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_31.pdf*

- **Have a fun Vegetable Tasting Day.** Encourage each child's family to bring one unique vegetable for the group to taste. How about purple cauliflower, asparagus, spaghetti squash, tomatillos, or kohlrabi?

Connect With Parents and the Community

- **Explore the "Grow It, Try It, Like It!" education kit.** Growing vegetables, like spinach or crookneck squash, in a garden or container can help increase children's willingness to taste them. Arrange a field trip to a local farm or community garden to expose kids to more vegetables. *http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/growit.html*

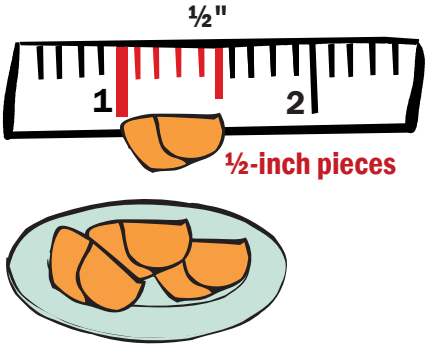
- **Participate in Farm to Child Care activities.** Arrange to have farmers bring fresh, seasonal produce deliveries for your child care program. *http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/farm_to_childcare.htm*

- **Send the message home.** Share the *Nibbles for Health* take-home newsletter for parents on trying new foods together. *http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_14.pdf*

How can I keep vegetables safe?

For children younger than 4 years old:

- **Cut raw vegetables in small pieces no larger than one-half inch (½") to prevent choking.**
- **Shred carrots and other hard vegetables.**
- **Slice cherry or grape tomatoes and other round foods in half, and then cut into smaller pieces.**
- **Offer cooked or soft vegetables to younger children to prevent choking.**
- **See Appendix A on page 77 for more information on choking hazards.**

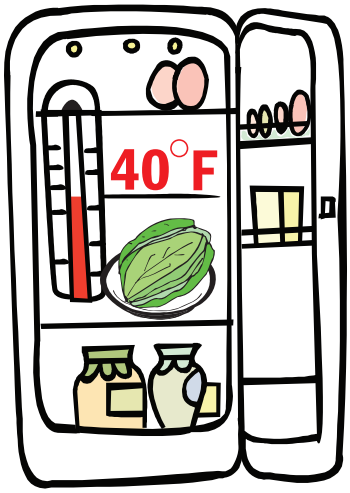


Clean

- **Rinse all produce thoroughly under running water before eating, cutting, or cooking.** Do not use soap or detergent. Scrub firm vegetables, such as cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Dry produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel to further reduce bacteria that may be present.
- **Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to rinse it first.** That's because it is easy to transfer dirt and bacteria from the outside to the inside of the vegetable when you are cutting.
- **Before opening a can of vegetables or beans, wash and dry the top of the can.** Under clean, running water, rub the top of the can briskly with a clean cloth or paper towel to remove dirt and germs from the surface. Dry with a clean cloth towel or paper towel after washing.

Prepare and Store Safely

- **Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh vegetables** before preparing or eating. Produce that looks rotten or has mold on it should be thrown away.
- **Store perishable fresh vegetables (like lettuce, herbs, and mushrooms) in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40 °F or below**. Refrigerate all produce that is purchased precut or peeled to maintain both quality and safety. If you're not sure whether an item should be refrigerated, ask the produce manager at your supermarket.
- **Keep vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood** while shopping, preparing, or storing them.
- **See the Food Safety tip sheet on page 55 for more food safety tips.**



Activities

How can I put this information into practice?

Take a look at your current weekly or cycle menu. Circle the menu items to which you can add more vegetables.

What other ways will you try to promote vegetables?

Put a check mark next to actions you will try next month. Next month, I will:

- ☐ **Promote a different "vegetable of the week" every week.**

  Next month, I will promote:

  _____

  _____

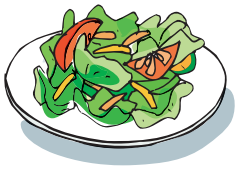
  _____

  _____

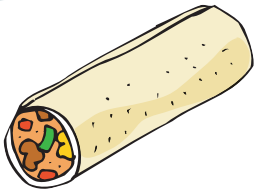
- ☐ **Purchase and serve vegetables in season to save money.** For example, asparagus in the spring, green peppers in the summer, sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts in the fall, and cabbage and acorn squash in the winter.

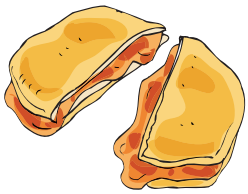
How will you offer vegetables next month? As part of a:

- ☐ **Salad**
- ☐ **Sandwich**

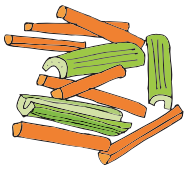


- ☐ **Veggie Roll-Up** (veggies wrapped in a whole-grain tortilla with low-fat ranch dressing)

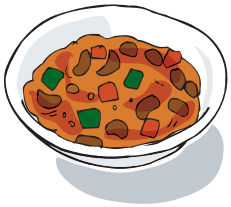




- ☐ **Veggie Burrito or Quesadilla**
- ☐ **Stir-Fry**
- ☐ **Pasta Dish or Lasagna Meal**
- ☐ **Pasta Salad**
- ☐ **Snack**
- ☐ **Veggie Sticks With Dip Snack**



- ☐ **Veggie Bake** (vegetables roasted in the oven)

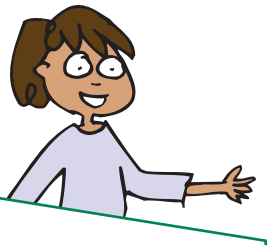


- ☐ **Soup, Chili, or Stew**
- ☐ **Pizza**
- ☐ **Egg Dish**

CACFP Crediting Tip:
Make sure you offer the full portion of vegetables depending on the meal and the age of the child.

more 'Activities' on next page ...

... more 'Activities'



What vegetables listed below will you try on your menu?
Go for variety and color from each of these vegetable groups!
Circle what you plan to try next month.

Dark-Green Vegetable

- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Collard greens
- Dark-green leafy lettuce
- Kale
- Mesclun
- Mustard greens
- Romaine lettuce
- Spinach
- Turnip greens
- Watercress

Red and Orange Vegetables

- Acorn squash
- Butternut squash
- Carrots
- Hubbard squash
- Pumpkin
- Red peppers
- Sweet potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Tomato juice (low-sodium)

Other Vegetables

- Artichokes
- Asparagus
- Avocado
- Bean sprouts
- Beets
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Crookneck squash
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Green beans
- Green peppers
- Iceberg (head) lettuce
- Mushrooms
- Okra
- Onions
- Parsnips
- Turnips
- Wax beans
- Zucchini

Starchy Vegetables

- Cassava
- Corn
- Fresh cowpeas or field peas
- Green bananas
- Green peas
- Green lima beans
- Plantains
- Potatoes
- Taro
- Water chestnuts

Dry Beans and Peas

- Black beans
- Black-eyed peas
- Garbanzo beans (chickpeas)
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Navy beans
- Pinto beans
- Soy beans
- Split peas
- White beans

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My Notes: