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COVERT OPERATION: SHOULD YOU HIDE YOUR KIDS' VEGGIES?

Home > Articles > News & Tips: Health

by [Lisa Suriano](#)

April 23, 2012

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Related: [hiding vegetables in other foods](#), [getting kids to eat vegetables](#), [how to make vegetables fun](#), [how to get kids to eat veggies](#).

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Most kids don't get the recommended daily serving of vegetables, causing some parents to resort to hiding them in other foods. A local expert offers a better way.

From brownies with beets to smoothies with spinach, parents trying to improve their children's nutritional intake use many tricky methods to slip vegetables into meals and treats -- an approach that can be very effective. In fact, these children are often reaching and surpassing their recommended five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables each day, which is something only an average of 23 percent of adult Americans manage to do. Puréeing and blending veggies into foods is a great way to get your daily dose, and for many adults, it's a practice we should consider incorporating into our daily routine.



But when it comes to kids, this method should be implemented

thoughtfully. According to research in the [Journal of the American Dietetic Association](#), children require repeated exposure to a new food in order to become familiar with it and accepting of it in their diet. Sneaking an unfamiliar vegetable like butternut squash into a dish goes against this psychology by robbing kids of those necessary exposures. If it's hidden, kids won't realize the sweet and delicious treat they're eating is butternut squash and won't recognize it when they come across it in its natural form, which means they'll be more likely to refuse it. This resistance can create a power struggle over vegetables, and anxiety is not an emotion we want our kids associating with healthy foods.

Not to mention that puréeing vegetables is a laborious and time-consuming task. "I did all this work back when I was making baby food," a frustrated mother of a 2-year-old recently told me. "I do not want to have to keep doing this now that he is eating solid food!" Peel, cook, and purée first...then prepare dinner?! That's a lot of extra steps in a parent's overscheduled life. **Nutritious eating behaviors need to be sustainable in order to be effective**, and most of us don't have the time to purée on a regular basis when we're already struggling to cook fresh meals for our families throughout the week.

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To Sneak or Not to Sneak?

So what can you do? Introduce your children to vegetables in any manner you can. Continue to blend vegetables into sauces, stews, and soups -- in addition to boosting the nutritional value of your dishes, blending in vegetables bolsters a dish's flavor and texture. But don't rely solely on this method. Make veggies part of your home environment and a staple at meal times by following these six tips:

1. Keep your refrigerator stocked with fresh produce like celery, cucumbers, and sugar snap peas. Bag them up for a crunchy snack in the car or put them out on a plate 30 minutes before dinnertime.

2. Engage your kids when you prepare food. Let them toss a handful of spinach into the blender as you make the morning [smoothie](#) or have them tear the lettuce for a salad.

3. Empower your children to make healthy food choices. When making a [salad](#), ask them to decide what goes into it by selecting the vegetables, dressing, and any other add-ins you have on hand.

4. Take a little extra time in the produce section of the grocery store. Ask your kids to help you pick out the fruits and veggies for the week.

5. For younger kids, start by introducing the flavors of sweet potatoes or cauliflower by puréeing it into their favorite mac and cheese recipe. Gradually progress to adding small chunks of the vegetable to the dish. In time, the flavors will become more and more familiar.

6. Display produce that does not require refrigeration, such as tomatoes and sweet potatoes, in an attractive bowl on your kitchen table.



Lisa Suriano, M.S., is the founder and creator of the [Veggiecation Program](#), a curriculum-based nutrition education program that introduces young children to the delicious and nutritious world of vegetables through school programs in 24 states, including more than 100 public schools throughout New York City. She also serves as a board member for the [New York Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), which works to bring plant-based foods and nutrition education into our schools.

Also see: [10 tips from the USDA on making fruits and veggies fun for kids](#)

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