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Enhancing the lives of children with disabilities

Encouraging Fruits and Vegetables



This TelAbility handout will provide parents with some ideas on incorporating fruits and vegetables into their child's diet on a regular basis.

Mention a fruit or vegetable and most kids will crinkle their noses at you! Although this food group covers one of the largest sections of the food guide pyramid, only one in five children receive the recommended amount of servings each day. Children with special needs are not exempt from this trend. Fruits and vegetables add some very needed fiber and fluid into the diet of a child with special needs, and provides many vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A and C, iron and folate, which are all very important for our daily health. In addition, fruits and vegetables have substances called phytochemicals, which have been found to have disease-fighting properties.

Fruits are generally not a problem for toddlers to eat, as tots tend to prefer sweet tastes. Vegetables, however, can be another story! Here are some suggestions to help your child increase their consumption of vegetables.

- ✓ Start early! Use vegetable-based baby foods as well as fruits (babies tend to prefer sweet tastes very early on, so you may need to grin and bear some "sour" looking facial expressions at first.) Work pureed and finely chopped vegetables into the diet as your baby transitions from baby food to a table food diet.
- ✓ Some vegetables can have a strong taste-it may take up to 10 different trials before a toddler will accept a new food.
- ✓ Set a good example. Kids often like to try things off of their parent's plates. If you never eat vegetables or are very particular about them, they will follow suit.
- ✓

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- ✓ Let your child help! An older toddler can tear up lettuce, run the water to wash the vegetables and put salad in small bowls. Kids love to pretend and help, and this whole process will make them feel proud and more likely to eat what they have prepared.
- ✓ Visit a farmer's market or farm to expose your child to different stages of growing vegetables. (Example: if you visit a pumpkin patch, make pumpkin bread when you return home so she can see the relationship). Plant some tomatoes in your yard and watch them grow and then use them in a variety of ways in your meals (in salads, make picante and serve with chips, chop and serve with tacos etc)
- ✓ If your child will not eat a raw/cooked form of a certain vegetable, get creative! Dipping vegetables in dips, salad dressing, hummus and plain yogurt is both fun and nutritious.
- ✓ Carrot/pumpkin/zucchini and banana breads are fun to make (toddlers can add some of the ingredients and stir), and will meet some of the daily requirements for fruits and vegetables. Incorporate veggies into spaghetti sauce and casseroles. Add baby peas or broccoli to macaroni and cheese. Use vegetable based soups as a meal or a meal component.
- ✓ Read your toddler books about healthy nutrition and fruits and vegetables. Examples are "The Very Hungry Caterpillar", "How a Seed Grows", "The Carrot Seed", "Stone Soup" etc.
- ✓ Be certain to keep your child's chewing and swallowing abilities in mind when serving fruits and vegetables. Many can be "stringy" or have hard skins that may be difficult for some children to chew. Some may even cause choking. Adapt the texture of the fruit or vegetable to your child's comfort and safety level. Work with your health care team to determine the best texture for your child, and have this re-evaluated, as feeding abilities can often change over time.

How do I know how many fruit and vegetable servings my child needs to eat every day?

Remember the **5 A DAY RULE** (at least 5 servings of fruits and veggies per day)

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What is a serving for a toddler/preschooler??

Servings for a toddler are much smaller than for us.

A general rule of thumb: 1 Tbsp per year of life

More specific portion sizes for ages 1-3 years

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetables or vegetable juice

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup fruit or fruit juice

Sample 5- A -Day eating plan

Breakfast $\frac{1}{4}$ cup blueberries

Snack: 2-3 ounces orange juice (6-7 ounces diluted with water)

Lunch: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup broccoli

Dinner: $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced strawberries, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of cooked carrots

= 5 Servings per day!

For more information on this topic, contact Sharon Wallace, RD, CSP, CNSD, LDN at sharonwallace@nc.rr.com or contact your local pediatric nutritionist.

Resources

Swinney B. Healthy Food for Healthy Kids: A Practical guide to your Child's Nutrition. New York: Meadowbrook Press, 1999.

www.keepkidshealthy.com/nutrition/kids_food_guide_pyramid.html

This site will provide more information on the food guide pyramid for children

www.dole5aday.com -this is a fun site for parents, health care providers and especially kids! It offers many ideas on using fruits and vegetables in the diet and provides lots of "kid-tested" recipes.

www.cancernetwork.com/journals/oncnews/n9510e.htm

This site offers more in depth information on the role of phytochemicals from foods in disease prevention.

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