



“Have you had your greens?”

Remember when your mom would ask that question? Now I’m the mom asking the question. Truth is, the better question is “Have you had your five colors?”

“Eat from all the color groups every day to reap the full health-promoting benefits fruits and vegetables have to offer including essential vitamins, minerals and fiber.” 5aday.org

Teaching children to have a good relationship with food is a huge responsibility. I want to help instill good habits now, so that they will make healthy choices later. How can you increase your fruit and veggie intake to five or more? Or the bigger question, how do you increase your children’s ?

Here are 10 tricks to get your numbers up:

- 1) Precut vegetables and store them in the fridge. Use them to supplement a meal. Offer dips, sauces and dressings to make them more enticing.
- 2) Keep a bowl of fresh fruit on the counter. In the summer, I leave a colander of washed grapes or strawberries on the kitchen counter. Without a word from me, fruit disappears.
- 3) Remember that juice counts...if it’s 100% juice (6oz.= 1 serving). Experts caution against drinking *all* of your servings, lest you miss out on benefits from fiber and other nutrients.
- 4) Carry dried fruits and juice in the car for emergencies. (Read: starving children) Dried fruit won’t melt like other snacks.
- 5) Toast raisin bread for breakfast and top with peanut butter and bananas.
- 6) Expand your horizons beyond apples, oranges and bananas. Try different fruits and vegetables. Experiment. Pick a new fruit or vegetable every week. Make it a game.
- 7) Throw a handful of frozen vegetables into your soup or stir-fry. Because vegetables are flash frozen right after they are picked, they are just as healthy as fresh!
- 8) Try combining several veggies together. Try a cucumber and tomato salad, or make your own [salsa](#). Or make [Fresh Fruit Salad](#). It will last several days in the fridge. Options like these make it easy to serve more fruits and vegetables!
- 9) Have a salad. Add fun toppings to salads like chopped veggies, mandarin oranges, strawberries, nuts or Craisins.
- 10) Think color. Whenever you get a chance, include another color. Add a tomato or avocado to your sandwich. Add a banana, frozen blueberries or raspberries to

your cereal. Make a smoothie using frozen fruits and yogurt. Or add fruit to plain yogurt. The possibilities are limitless.

I recently attended a seminar by Barb Demlow, R.D. In the field of nutrition, Registered Dietitians are the experts. Barb reiterated the fact that mom's are the biggest influence on a child's nutrition. She encouraged us to prepare our children with "an arsenal of good eating habits" and suggested that we "enter the child's world and make eating fruits and vegetables fun." *No small task if you have a picky eater!* Did you know that many young children must be offered a food 8-10 times before they are willing to try it? Don't give up. There's hope.

Here are 10 ways to teach children good eating habits:

- 1) Think of yourself as the Executive Chef - not a Short Order Cook.
- 2) Determine rules for trying new foods. Base this on your child and what they can tolerate. Some children can easily take one bite. Others may only be able to lick a new food because they are so sensitive to textures that it may come back up. Whatever rules you decide upon, be consistent.
- 3) Don't punish, bribe, console or reward your child with food or it may lead to emotional eating patterns.
- 4) Don't overload small children with too much food at one time. A general serving rule is to allow one tablespoon of food for each year of a child's life. For example one serving for a four year old would be four tablespoons of applesauce.
- 5) Let children win. Serve two vegetables and ask them to try one.
- 6) Expose them to as many foods as possible. Make it an adventure.
- 7) Create structured eating times. Very young children need three meals a day and one or two snacks. Their stomachs are small and they fill up fast. If you don't feed them snacks their blood sugar can dip and that can lead to a melt-down.
- 8) Present food in a fun way. Cut the foods into interesting shapes; draw smiley faces on top of casseroles with vegetable or fruit strips. Older children love to eat fruit chunks with toothpicks. Use fun plates or crazy straws.
- 9) Teach your kids that fruits and vegetables are "grow food" and that they are a better option than foods with empty calories.
- 10) Set a good example. Children will watch you and mirror what you do.

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Karen Henke is the owner of Come2Order in Minneapolis, MN. Visit www.come2order2day.com and request a *free* Time-Savers Kit which is loaded with time-saving tips and services. *And* sign up for a subscription to the *free* monthly newsletter.