



Veggies under cover

When peas and carrots just get pushed around the plate, should you start hiding them?

BY SYDNEY LONEY

I T'S AMAZING WHAT YOU can fit in a meatball. Anne Loucks started amping up the nutritional content of hers (she adds mushrooms, zucchini, carrots, onions and peppers) when she realized it was a great way to get a full serving of vegetables into her kids. "I started hiding veggies in other foods when my oldest was about 15 months old," says the Ottawa mom. "He was a picky eater, and getting him to eat vegetables was a challenge."

Mitchell, now five, and his three-year-old sister, Alexis, will eat broccoli and cauliflower, but when other produce appears on their plates, the kids revolt. "It's so much easier to grate or purée vegetables into something else—and then breathe a big sigh of relief knowing your kids just ate five veggies," Loucks says.

So how do the experts feel about serving vegetables incognito? It's best not to do it during a child's first year, says Ali Chernoff, a registered dietitian in Vancouver and author of *Good Food Toddler* (Energy Essentials). "That's when they need to get used to the taste." And don't give up on the real deal too soon with older kids. "You may have to offer it 15 times before they eat it," she says.

On the other hand, kids do need four to five servings of fruit and vegetables a day, Chernoff adds. Which is why she isn't against hiding them if you have to. And a recent study in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found concealing puréed vegetables in the meals of kids ages three to five led to greater veggie consumption—nearly twice as much over the course of a day.

serve veggies au naturel

If you're trying to get more produce into your child by hiding it in other foods, it's still important to serve vegetables the old-fashioned way and eat them in front of your kids too, Chernoff says. Peas, broccoli, carrots and sweet potatoes are good choices because they're usually well tolerated by most kids, she says. "The good news is that at this age, it's still easy to turn children's eating habits around because their taste buds are still developing and as they get used to the taste and texture of different vegetables, they'll carry the healthy habit of eating them into adulthood."

how to hide them

Missy Chase Lapine, author of *The Sneaky Chef* (Running Press), calls her approach to feeding time "sneak and teach." Her mac and

cheese is chock full of cauliflower. "I still teach my kids about nutrition and serve complete, nutritious meals with vegetables in their natural form," she says. "But why make a meatball without eight vegetables in it? It's just healthier."

Besides, she says, when kids discover that cauliflower has been camouflaged in their mac and cheese all along, they're actually more inclined to try it on its own—and often realize they like that way too. "The simple way to get kids eating more vegetable is to sneak them into what they already love," Chase Lapine says. She often recommends her signature purple purée (blueberries and spinach) for everything from brownies to burgers. "Just a little dollop here and there goes a long way to good health."

the best of both worlds

Despite having perfected a 10-veggie tomato sauce, Loucks still serves various veggies with dip on the side at meals and hopes for the best. "I just want to make sure they're still eating them in one form or another."

Sydney Loney is a writer and founder of justthefactsbaby.com who makes a mean veggie-packed meatloaf.

the sneaky chef's purple purée

Makes about 1 cup of purée

3 cups raw baby spinach leaves*

1½ cups fresh or frozen blueberries (no syrup or sugar added)

½ tsp lemon juice

1-2 tbsp water

*Note: If you must use frozen spinach, only use 1 cup.

1 Thoroughly wash the spinach, even if the package says "pre-

washed." If using frozen blueberries, quickly rinse them under cold water (to thaw a little) and then drain. 2 Fill the bowl of your food processor with the spinach, blueberries, lemon juice and 1 tablespoon water; purée on high until as smooth as possible. Stop occasionally to push the contents to the bottom. If necessary, use another tablespoon of water to smooth out the purée.

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