

YOUNG CHILDREN AND FRUIT & VEGETABLES

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre. Including more fruit and vegetables as part of a balanced diet will help your children grow and develop, improve vitality and help prevent a range of chronic diseases such as Type II Diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and some forms of cancer.

It is recommended that adults eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables each day. These amounts vary for children and adolescents, depending on their age and activity levels.

How do I encourage my children to eat fruit & vegetables?

Encouraging young children to eat fruit and vegetables can sometimes be a struggle. Research has shown that the more fruit and vegetables are available and easily accessible for children ie; (chopped up and ready to eat) the more likely they are to eat them.

Providing a variety of different fruits and vegetables is one way to encourage young children towards healthy eating habits, however you need to be patient. There is some evidence that young children need to try new fruits and vegetables up to eight or nine time before they are liked or accepted.

As a parent you can help this process by being creative in the way you serve up fruit and vegetables. For example, prepare vegetables in different ways to vary the texture such as raw, microwaved, mashed, baked, grated into a casserole or frittata, blended up as a pasta sauce or as a soup.

Fruit juice or fruit drinks should not be considered as a substitute for real fruit. Fruit juice is often regarded as a healthy choice as it contains Vitamin C. However one small glass (125 ml) of most juices provides a child's daily requirement for Vitamin C. More than this provides excess sugar and kilojoules that can contribute to weight gain. A piece of fruit is a better choice than juice.

Easy fruit & vegetable ideas

TRY AND MAKE FRUIT AND VEGETABLES A PART OF EVERY MEAL OR SNACK, for example:

- Top breakfast cereal with fruit;
- Add chopped or pureed fruit to reduced-fat yoghurt (for children over two) as a snack;
- Make a smoothie with fresh, frozen or canned fruit;
- As a topping on toast ie – banana, mushrooms, tomatoes;
- Chop up fruit or vegie sticks for your child's lunchbox;
- In Summer, freeze fruit on a skewer as a snack; or
- Add vegies to a stir-fry, chopped up in meat loaf or a casserole or on a home-made pizza.

Select fruit and vegetables which are in season. They will taste better and are usually cheaper than those that are out of season.

Did you know?

- Less than 50% of children aged two to four years consume the recommended amount of vegetables; and
- Research has shown that children who watch a lot of television are more likely to snack frequently on foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar in response to television advertising and tend to eat less fruit and vegetables.

