

Produce Results

Give your vegetables more kid appeal

by MADELEINE GREY

When my kids say “yuck!” at the dinner table, I long for the days when I fed their compliant baby faces mouthful after blissful mouthful of puréed vegetables. But they grew up and learned to revolt at the sight of spinach and call warfare over cauliflower.

Experts, like Toronto mom and author of *Cook Once a Week Eat Well Every Day* Theresa Albert-Ratchford, tell me to steer clear of conflict. “Avoid arm wrestling over vegetables,” she says, “because the moment kids sense eating veggies is a forced thing, it will become a resisted thing.”

Albert-Ratchford tallies with a “disguise and conquer” approach when serving vegetables to her 10-year-old daughter, Jameson. “I hide sweet potatoes and zucchini in home-baked muffins and grate carrots into spaghetti sauce or cheese quesadillas,” she says.

That kind of subterfuge might be in order since Canadian kids just aren’t eating their vegetables. According to studies by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, only 14 percent of Canadian tweens (aged nine to 12) are eating four or more servings of fruit and vegetables. Younger kids aren’t faring much better. Just 20 percent of six- to 12-year-olds eat the recommended amount — five to 10 servings a day. Problem is, when Junior doesn’t dine on dark leafy greens and orange-coloured vegetables, he’s missing out on a powerhouse of nutrients. Iceberg lettuce, celery and cucumbers — while better than nothing — don’t rack up a lot of points in the vitamin-mineral department. So go for colour when choosing veggies (see “The Colour of Health”).



The Dish on Portions

calories	242
protein	3 g
fat	6.9 g
fibre	5.3 g
vitamin A	386%*
vitamin C	73%*
vitamin B ₆	24%*
folate	18%*

*of recommended daily amount

Baked Sweet Potato Fries

A perfect match: the most nutritious vegetable you can find made into a (healthy) french fry. My household likes these best with the skins left on. If you choose not to peel them, be sure to wash well beforehand.

- 2 lb (1 kg)** sweet potatoes (about 2 large or 4 medium)
- 2 tbsp (30 mL)** olive oil
- salt**

Preheat the oven to 400 °F (200°C). Slice sweet potatoes into ½ in. (1 cm) thick sticks and place in a large bowl. Pour in oil and mix well. On a parchment-paper-lined baking sheet, arrange potatoes in a single layer. Bake on middle rack of oven for 15 minutes, remove from oven and turn them over. Bake another 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. Season with salt.

Makes about 4 servings.

Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests our Nutrition column using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

COMPLIANT CONSUMPTION

Up the veggie eating in your house:

Get them when they're hungry. When prepping dinner, put out a plate of red pepper strips, baby carrots and broccoli florets to soothe grumbling tummies. Have some kebabs (grape tomatoes, cucumbers and feta on a skewer) ready for after school. Serve veggies and a fun dip to preschoolers for a snack. (Check out this month's *Cooking with Kids* for dip ideas.)

Freshen up with mint. The gum and candy associated flavours of mint can open the door to other fresh herbs like parsley and basil which are all high in the same nutrients found in dark leafy green vegetables.

Stay cool at snack time. A frozen pea, corn niblet or diced piece of carrot doesn't have the same strong flavour as cooked, or even raw. In mixed bags of frozen veggies you'll find snow peas, baby corn, cauliflower — even Brussels sprouts. (To avoid choking, wait until your child is at least three years old.)

Get souped up. Canned and ready-to-serve soups can be nutritious (look for sodium reduced, if possible). Best picks include good ol' tomato, mixed vegetable, minestrone and puréed soups like Campbell's Gardennay Golden Autumn Carrot and Knorr Red Pepper and Tomato Soup.

Shake it up. If the same old carrots and peas show up on the table every night, you'll miss out on a spectacular vegetable safari. Break out of your routine and try something new. You never know — a fresh fan of okra, bok choy or parsnips could be in your midst! ♥

Nutritional Top 10

Number one is **sweet potato**, then:

- carrots
- spinach
- collard greens
- raw red pepper
- kale
- dandelion greens
- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts and, yes,
- the humble baked potato with skin

The Colour of Health

BEST BETAS

That deep orange of sweet potatoes, carrots and squash is created by a plant pigment called beta carotene which our bodies convert into vitamin A. Kids need it for vision and immunity and, later on, to protect against age-related diseases such as cancer and heart disease. Who would have thought that a common weed is actually one of the biggest sources? Dark green leafy veggies such as dandelion (bitter, yes, but many Mediterranean children are raised on the stuff) are bursting with beta carotene, but sure aren't orange! That's because chlorophyll camouflages the beta carotene pigment in dark green leafy vegetables.

Top picks: Sweet potatoes, dandelion/chicory, asparagus, carrots, pumpkin, kale, winter squash, beet greens, watercress and Swiss chard.

C NOTES

Why take a pill when you can get your C from vegetables? This mighty vitamin increases resistance to infection, maintains healthy gums and, for those pirates out there, protects against scurvy. Besides, C helps control jittery nerves and manage stress — something even kids aren't immune to. Another bonus: Vitamin C helps kids absorb iron.

Top picks: Sweet bell peppers (red, yellow, orange and green), kale, broccoli, broccoflower, cauliflower, parsley, peas, red cabbage, Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, bok choy. Pssst...even potatoes and salsa are sources of C.

FABULOUS FOLATE

More commonly known among the maternity set as folic acid (the synthetic form found in supplements and fortified foods), folate is essential for proper growth and development. Moreover, it helps produce red blood cells that carry oxygen to the brain. The more oxidized a brain, the better it learns!

Top picks: Romaine, Boston, bibb and butterhead lettuce, spinach, green peas, asparagus, dandelion, avocado, fresh fava beans, Brussels sprouts, corn and beets. Chinese food lovers take note: Mung bean sprouts and yard-long beans are high in folate too.

PUMPING IRON

Blood relies on iron, yet it's the most common nutrient deficiency among children. Periods of rapid growth — such as infancy and adolescence — call out for iron. Vegetables contain iron, but sadly, it's not as easily absorbed by the body as "heme" iron, or iron found in meat. The trick is to team up veggies high in C on the same plate as iron-rich foods to boost the odds.

Top picks: Believe it or not, a large baked potato with skin has more iron than a small hamburger patty. Absorb it better with salsa on top. Other sources include Swiss chard, lima beans, avocado, green peas, pumpkin, sweet potato, beets and artichokes.

FIBRE FIX

Fibre keeps a kid's plumbing clog-free. Plus, fibre makes kids feel full, helping them manage a healthy weight.

Top picks: Green peas, carrots, sweet corn, broccoli, sweet potato, potato (especially the skin), beans, spinach, beet greens, Swiss chard.



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