

Hello! My name is Patty Sheehan and I'm a graduate student in the Food and Nutrition Program at Framingham State University. In this brief podcast, I am going to discuss various ways to encourage your kids to eat more fruits and vegetables.

In our present-day world, children are being flooded with mixed messages about food. The food industry targets children in junk food advertisements because kids generally have the best chance of convincing their parents to purchase these foods. Many of us know how frustrating it can be to go to the grocery store with a child who is constantly begging for sweets. Sometimes it is difficult for us to stand our ground and we often find ourselves buying junk food to keep our children happy.

Because frequently consuming junk foods can be detrimental to your kid's health, either now or later in life, it is important to make sure we are encouraging the consumption of healthier options whenever possible. These lessons are better taught at a young age, as they can influence decisions made into adulthood.

When children are waiting for dinner, it is not unusual for them to get impatient while their meal is being prepared. Simply putting out a plate of fruits or vegetables, such as carrot sticks or fresh apple slices can be an effective way to encourage healthy eating. When children are hungry, and food is available, it often doesn't matter what it is. However, if there is no food in sight, children have a way of digging up the most sugar-packed items in the pantry.

Another important thing to note is that children often need to be exposed to a single food item more than a dozen times before it is accepted. Many parents will abandon a vegetable if a child rejects it more than once or twice. Although it can be challenging and oftentimes stressful to keep trying, research *has* shown that repeated exposure can be very effective. It also helps to encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture — not whether or not it tastes good.

Including your children in activities such as gardening, food preparation, or even vegetable selection at the grocery store, can be another great way to get them excited about eating these foods. At the table, make sure your children know what a great job they did harvesting, preparing, or selecting the vegetables. They will want to know for themselves how good the final product is, for sure.

Forcing children to eat vegetables is never a good idea. Although we do want to encourage healthy eating, we must do so in a constructive way. By creating a happy and healthy eating environment, we are also crafting positive associations with these foods.

For more information on positive ways to encourage kids to eat vegetables, visit my blog: Nutripolicy.wordpress.com for a list of sources.

Thank you for listening. This is Patty Sheehan with Nutripolicy.