



Health and Safety: Eat Your Veggies!

Some vegetables can be bitter, and we have a built-in, survival reaction to avoid eating bitter things—it could be poison! Adults can override this instinct (and our taste buds dull as we age), but some children are overly sensitive to bitter tastes. This can be a genetic predisposition, and not simply a case of your child being contrary. People who are extra sensitive to bitter tastes are sometimes called "super-tasters". *This is a normal part of child development for some children.*

What you can try:

- Sweeten vegetables slightly by adding a light, fruit sauce, or minced fruit, to them. No need to go overboard on the sugar. Try a teaspoon of molasses or honey on some lightly steamed broccoli. Top chopped greens with applesauce. Try pureed bananas or blueberries on chopped asparagus. But try not to use only sweet vegetables (like peas, squash and corn); you'll miss out on important vitamins if you do.
- Choose your battles: Be aware that for "super-tasters", broccoli tends to be the worst offender. If your child refuses to eat broccoli, you may want to back off this one until they decide to try it on their own.
- Cooked vs. Raw: Some vegetables are more bitter raw; some taste bitter when cooked. Experiment.

Some children tend to avoid sweet vegetables (like carrots and red pepper).

What you can try:

- You can try to do the opposite as the previous example to make these vegetables more palatable: try to make the taste savory. For example: add a yogurt sauce. Or an ounce of grated low fat cheese. Or try baking these vegetables in a casserole with breadcrumbs on top.
- Experiment with cooked and raw. Some are sweeter cooked, some are sweeter raw.

Why do children say they don't like something before even trying?

With food, smell comes before taste. If a child says they don't want to eat something that they've never had before, and you say, "but you might like it if you tried it!"--remember that in a way, they already have tried it. They've most likely smelled it. And smell can be a stumbling block for tasting, especially when the smell is bitter. But it is natural and normal and not just your child acting out.

What you can try: Avoid overcooked vegetables. They tend to smell bitter, which turns children off from trying in the first place. Or hide the smell in a sauce. Of course, some children don't like "complicated" sauces, but simple, fruit-based sauces may be more palatable than savory sauces.

Regardless of what you try, avoid a battle: Don't try to influence children's tastes for vegetables. Let their taste buds and sense of smell develop. If they refuse to eat it, don't force it. If you become concerned that your child isn't getting enough vitamins because they won't eat **any** vegetables, don't panic. Consult your pediatrician. And remember, taste buds develop over time. Your child's tastes will change as they age.