

With Fruits, Veggies The More The Merrier

Tallahassee Democrat

Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent IV, Leon County Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

It's a fact, 96% of children and 90% of adults fall short of the current recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption which vary for age, gender and activity level. The United States Department of Agriculture reports that over half of all elementary school-age children eat no fruit on any given day. American families especially those with young children are among those eating the least amounts of fruits and vegetables according to the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH).

Vegetables and fruits are low in calories and fat and high in vitamins, minerals and fiber. Eating fruits and vegetables regularly has many benefits including lowering the risk of cardiovascular and heart disease, hypertension or high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, birth defects and many types of cancers. Getting enough fruits and veggies is particularly important for young children. The many nutrients found in produce help build healthy bodies and brains necessary for healthy futures.

There are many great tasting fruits and vegetables, and kids often realize this when they get to try ones they've never tasted. Sometimes a child will love a new fruit or vegetable the first time she tries it. Other times the new food may need to be introduced 6-12 times before a child decides they like it. Forcing a child to eat something he does not like will only create a bad situation with that food and at that meal! Don't give up! Offer new fruits and vegetables in small quantities with old favorites.

Be a good role model; don't make faces or bad remarks about foods. Children learn many of their behaviors by watching brothers and sisters and grownups. Children will follow your lead. Remember actions speak much louder than words, so start munching on those fruits and vegetables.

Try some of the following tips to include more vegetables and fruits in daily meals and snacks:

- Keep a bowl of whole fruit on the table, counter or in the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate bite size pieces of fruits and vegetables in plastic bags for easy grabbing.
- Serve fruits & veggies at every meal. If packing lunches include a fresh, canned or dried fruit for dessert.
- Drink **100%** fruit juice not flavored, colored, sweetened water – look at the label!
- Don't forget to top hot and cold cereal, pancakes and waffles with fruit.
- Make it as easy as adding slices of fresh vegetables like tomatoes or cucumbers to meals.
- Buy vegetables that are easy to prepare. Use the microwave to quickly "zap" them. Top with a little olive oil and lemon juice or shredded cheese.
- Add shredded vegetables to casseroles, soups and stews. Try shredded carrots or zucchini in spaghetti sauce or chili -- no one will ever know they are there!
- Make veggie pizzas instead of meat pizzas.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and PBH is leading a new national initiative, **Fruits & Veggies – More Matters®**, to promote increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The Florida Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee (FIFNC) has joined with CDC and PBH to promote this health campaign by producing an educational resource manual that may be downloaded from [www.floridawic.org/Documents/fruits\\_and\\_veggies--more\\_matters/](http://www.floridawic.org/Documents/fruits_and_veggies--more_matters/).

Visit the following websites to find out exactly how much produce you or your child needs each day and for recipes, tips and other information:

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/>

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/>

References:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib792/aib792-5/>

Nutrition and Menu Planning for Young Children, Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida IFAS - Leon County Extension office at 606-5203, weekdays 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m.

University of Florida IFAS - Leon County Extension is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, gender or national origin.