

15 Food Hacks to Get Your Kids to Eat More Veggies

1. Green Hulk smoothies – (or your child’s favorite green character, be it Kermit or Ninja Turtles) Add raw (washed) fresh spinach to a fruit smoothie. Here’s one of our recipes: frozen bite size pieces of banana, sliced peaches, strawberries, spinach and coconut water. The frozen banana gives it an ice cream shake feel. The coco water is more hydrating with less calories than milk or yogurt. The fruit disguises the taste of spinach. Proportion the fruit servings to your taste.
2. Vegie tails – Using raw veggies such as celery, carrot sticks, radishes, grape tomatoes fashion critters to sit on their plates (use toothpicks to hold it all together). You can use peanut butter and raisins for the eyes as an extra touch.
3. I spy broccoli-not. – Steam broccoli or cauliflower and puree; add it to spaghetti sauce and they’ll never be the wiser, but will be healthier.
4. Brownie gems – Again using steamed and pureed broccoli, but this time you can add it to brownies. The chocolate will mask the vegie flavor, as long as you aren’t adding 5 cups.
5. Christmas trees – Sometimes renaming an undesired food has a desirable effect. Broccoli becomes a Christmas tree with a pile of snow (ranch dressing) to dip it in. My son didn’t like waffles (go figure) until I started calling them wrinkled pancakes. As adults now, I don’t think they’d eat anything called “wrinkled.” My kids still laugh at all the weird things I did to their food.
6. The curious case of killer cupcakes – Instead of making traditional white cupcakes, make zucchini cakes. Use a zucchini bread recipe, pour into cupcake tins and lower the cook time. Filled with zuch’s and carrots it’s a much healthier choice, but with the looks of a cupcake, kids still think they are getting a treat. And they are.
7. Broccoli or cauliflower rice – This straight up is the easiest. Trader Joe’s sells bags of these two veggies that look and taste like rice, but are pure vegetable. There may be other stores that sell this as well, but we happen to buy ours at TJ’s.
8. Vegie balls – Cook and puree carrots and add them to your turkey burgers or meatballs.
9. Spaghetti squash – If you haven’t tried this yet you are missing out. Slice open a spaghetti squash, literally that’s what it’s called, and place face down in baking dish with a little water and bake at 350 degrees for 30-45 minutes (depending on size). Once out, let cool a bit then use a fork to scrape the “meat”. It will come out stringy looking like spaghetti noodles. Add your favorite pasta sauce and voila. A no carb, high nutrient meal.
10. It’za pizza – Thinly slice your veggies of choice to your own homemade pizza, cover with sauce or cheese to hide the veggies. Zucchini, peppers and mushrooms are all great pizza toppings.
11. Appetizers – Before you are even thinking about dinner, the kids start asking for food, so why not put out a tray of veggies and a little dip. I put out a variety so they won’t get tired of eating the same ones all the time. Celery, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, grape tomatoes, cucumbers, mushrooms, snap peas, and olives are all part of our appetizer tray. Also, we keep a ziplock bag of cut veggies in the fridge and the kids know if they are ever hungry before any meal they are free to eat all the veggies they want.
12. Soup or stew – Sometimes it’s as simple as serving it in a liquid that changes their perception of what they are eating, so why not make vegie soup or stew.
13. Create-a-face – This may sound odd, but let them “play” with their food. Place a variety of veggies – shredded lettuce, grape tomatoes halved, sliced olives, strings of celery, shredded carrots, a little dressing etc. and let them make funny faces on their plate using the foods. When done they eat.
14. Grow your own – Face it, kids love to get dirty, so why not let them help plant a garden (it doesn’t have to be big). They are more likely to want to eat the vegetables they grow themselves out of pride if nothing more.

15. Let them choose – Take your kids to the store and let them choose which vegetables to have for dinner. Not only do they enjoy being included in the decision making process, but they feel empowered by making choices, which helps their self-esteem. A win-win-win.

Remember to empower your children and include them in the process: letting them pick out which vegies to eat, having them help cook, growing their own food; they all have added benefits other than just vegetables. Kids grow up before you know it, enjoy your time together, and help them learn life skills all at the same time. You'll all be healthier for it.