

Tasty Tips for Better Nutrition

Sneaky Ways to Hide Vegetables



Eating a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can decrease your risk for diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. It also helps you keep a healthy weight, provides long-lasting energy, and promotes healthy skin and hair.

But what if your children refuse vegetables? The way you eat has a strong influence on your child's habits. If you don't eat green beans, odds are neither will your child. Fortunately, you can retrain your taste buds. But it can take up to 17 times to know if you truly dislike a food, so try, try, and try again!

Use these sneaky tips to add veggies to favorite dishes. When finely chopped and cooked down, your kids won't even know veggies are there. They'll only notice yummy food!

Kitchen equipment you'll need: blender, box grater, food processor.

That's it! These three pieces of equipment will give you the ability to create healthy and delicious dishes that are pleasing to the eye and tummy. For a shortcut, stock your freezer with precut/shredded/and whole microwavable vegetables.

Tip #1: Any liquid, sauce, dip, or soup can easily hide a few extra veggies. Add cooked and pureed (soup-smooth) carrots, squash, zucchini, yellow and red bell pepper to marinara sauce, the cheese sauce in macaroni and cheese, vegetable soup, casseroles, lasagna, and even enchiladas. Pureed cauliflower can replace mashed potatoes, grits, and rice.

Tip #2: Chop veggies, such as carrots, kale, cauliflower, broccoli, squash, and zucchini, into very tiny pieces in a food processor and add to ground meat, meatballs, meatloaf, burgers, chili, chicken nuggets, and casseroles.

Tip #3: Grated or shredded squash, carrots, and zucchini are all easily disguised when baked into muffins, breads, cakes, or pancakes.

Tip #4: Introduce new vegetables by offering them in familiar ways. For example, try rutabaga fries, meatballs with marinara sauce over zucchini noodles, or cauliflower crust pizza.

Tip #5: Meal planning is key! Write down your meals and use ingredients more than once. (For example, last night's meatballs will be crumbled into tonight's chili.)

Tip #6: Choose one day of the week to prep/cook as much as possible. Cook proteins and pre-shred or pre-rice veggies so you can easily add them to dishes throughout the week.

Tip #7: Keep convenient food items such as pre-cooked chicken and steak strips, rotisserie chicken, and frozen vegetables on hand. Here are three easy ways to give your family a home-cooked meal in less than 15 minutes using a rotisserie chicken.

- Pineapple chicken tacos (recipe included)
- Burrito bowls (recipe included)
- Chicken salad (recipe included)

Tip #8: Give your child the right portion size: one tablespoon per year of age. For a meal of baked chicken, macaroni and cheese, and green beans, a three year old should get three tablespoons chicken, three tablespoons macaroni, and three tablespoons green beans.

Tip #9: Aim for half of the plate to be non-starchy vegetables. (Combine hidden and obvious vegetables!)

Tip #10: Slash the fat in your dishes by replacing half the ground meat with mushrooms or chopped veggies.

Tip #11: Reduce fat and sodium in dishes that have a cream-based or cheese sauce by replacing half the cheese and/or cream with cooked and pureed vegetables (soup-smooth) like carrots, cauliflower, squash, and yellow bell pepper.

Tip #11: Smoothies are a great place to hide veggies. Most store-bought smoothies and protein shakes are high in sugar but lack ingredients that help decrease hunger. Healthy smoothie ingredients are:

1. Protein: protein powder or Greek yogurt
2. Healthy fat: avocado, seeds (hemp hearts, flax, chia), nut butter
3. Liquid: water, low-fat milk, unsweetened almond, soy, or coconut milk
4. Vegetables: leafy greens, riced cauliflower, frozen pumpkin, or butternut squash
5. Fruit: A tiny bit of fruit (half of a frozen banana or a half cup of berries) will mask the taste of the vegetables with sweetness.

Recipes

Pineapple Chicken Tacos

Servings: 4

Ingredients

Chicken

- 2 cups shredded chicken
- 8-oz can tomato sauce
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste

Pineapple salsa

- 1 cup pineapple, finely diced
- ½ cup red bell pepper, finely diced
- 2 Tbsp red onion, finely minced
- 1 Tbsp lime juice
- ½ cup loosely packed cilantro leaves, finely chopped

Cilantro sauce

- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves, roughly chopped
- 2 tsp lime juice
- 1 tsp honey
- ¼ cup prepared green salsa
- Salt and pepper to taste

For assembly

- 1 cup finely shredded purple cabbage
- 8 corn tortillas

Directions:

- Add chicken, tomato sauce, chicken broth, chili powder, cumin, oregano, salt and pepper in bowl. Mix well. Add to a medium sauce pan and bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer 10 minutes.
- While chicken mixture is cooking, combine all ingredients for pineapple salsa in a bowl. Place in the refrigerator until ready to use.
- For cilantro sauce: place all ingredients in food processor. Blend until smooth.
- Assemble tacos: Corn tortilla, divide cabbage mixture evenly among tortillas. Top with ¼ cup chicken, drizzle with cilantro sauce and 1 Tbsp pineapple salsa.

Burrito Bowls

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- Leftover chicken from chicken tacos
- Bag of frozen rice/beans (heat in microwave)
- 1 cup lettuce, tomatoes, chopped
- 1 oz salsa
- 1 oz shredded cheese
- ½ avocado, diced
- Optional toppings: cilantro, lime wedge

Directions:

Add all ingredients to bowl and enjoy!

Chicken Salad

Servings: 1

Ingredients

- ½ cup shredded rotisserie chicken
- 1-2 Tbsp plain Greek yogurt
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- ¼ cup apples, diced
- ¼ cup grapes, sliced
- 2 Tbsp pecans, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Romaine or bibb lettuce leaves

Directions:

Mix chicken, yogurt, apples, grapes, pecans, celery, salt and pepper. Serve over lettuce with whole grain crackers.



Buffalo Chicken Spaghetti Squash Boats

Servings: 2-4

Ingredients

- 1 rotisserie chicken, shredded
- 1 medium spaghetti squash, halved
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 ribs celery, thinly sliced
- 2 green onions, white and green parts thinly sliced
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper
- ½ cup mild buffalo sauce
- ¼ cup ranch dressing- use Greek yogurt and ranch seasoning

Directions:

To roast the spaghetti squash, preheat the oven to 350. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Slice both ends from squash and discard. Stand squash up on one of its ends and use a large knife to cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop seeds and stringy insides out using a large spoon. Coat with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Place squash cut-side down on the baking sheet. Bake 30-40 minutes until squash is tender. Allow to cool slightly before using a fork to gently scrape the squash into a large bowl. Reserve the squash shells.

Add shredded chicken, celery, onions, peppers, and buffalo sauce to the bowl of spaghetti squash. Toss well to coat. Spoon back into shells and place onto baking sheet in oven for 10-15 minutes until cooked through. Drizzle with ranch dressing and sprinkle green onions over the top.



Cauliflower Shrimp & Grits

Servings: 4

Ingredients

Shrimp

- 1 pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined (frozen or fresh)
- 2 Tbsp Cajun seasoning
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1-2 tsp minced garlic
- 2 Tbsp roughly chopped fresh parsley
- Juice of ½ lemon

Grits

- 2 bags 10 oz frozen riced cauliflower
- 2 Tbsp butter
- ¼ c milk
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 2 laughing cow light swiss cheese wedges
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional, top with sliced green onions

Directions:

Grits: Microwave rice cauliflower according to directions on bag. Drain excess water and put into medium bowl adding butter, milk, parmesan cheese, and laughing cow cheese wedges. Stir until well combined, microwave for 1-2 minutes more and season with salt and pepper.

Shrimp: Pat shrimp dry and sprinkle with Cajun seasoning, coat well. Heat 2 Tbsp butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Once hot, add the shrimp and cook for 1-2 minutes until the bottom side begins to turn pink. Flip and cook 1-2 minutes until they are no longer translucent down the middle. Remove from skillet immediately and sprinkle with chopped parsley and lemon juice.

To serve: Spoon the cauliflower “grits” into serving bowls and top with shrimp, make sure to get the yummy sauce left from the skillet on top of the grits. Top with sliced green onions.



Hidden Veggie Meatballs

Servings: 6

Ingredients

- 1 cup fresh broccoli florets
- 1 cup zucchini, cubed
- 1 large carrot, roughly chopped (can also use pumpkin or parsnips)
- 1 ½ cup baby spinach, loosely packed
- 2 stalks green onions
- 1 clove garlic (or 1 tsp onion powder and garlic powder)
- ¾ tsp salt or to taste
- ¼ tsp pepper or to taste
- 1-½ tsp Italian seasoning
- 1 lb ground beef, turkey, or chicken
- 8 oz sliced mushrooms, chopped finely
- 2 Tbsp flax meal (or 1/2 cup panko bread crumbs)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400. Spray a small skillet with olive oil cooking spray and cook mushrooms on medium-high heat for 5-6 minutes. Place in a large bowl. In food processor, combine the broccoli, carrots, baby spinach, green onions, garlic. Pulse until finely chopped. Add to the bowl with the mushrooms.

Add the remaining ingredients. Using your hands, mix the ingredients until everything is well blended. Gently roll the meat into golf ball size portions (or into a meatloaf pan, or burger patties). Arrange the meatballs in a single layer in a large baking dish or baking tray sprayed with cooking spray. Bake 20-25 minutes until meat is cooked through. Serve meatballs over zucchini noodle pasta or sliced meatloaf over mashed cauliflower. Or make meatball subs or burgers.



Rutabaga Chili Cheese Fries

Ingredients

Chili

- 10-15 hidden veggie meatballs
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 Tbsp minced garlic
- 1 15-oz can diced tomatoes (with liquid)
- 1 6-oz can tomato paste
- 1 4-oz can green chilies (with liquid)
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 Tbsp cumin
- ½ Tbsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp salt, ½ tsp black pepper
- Toppings: shredded cheddar cheese and sliced green onions

Fries

- 8 cups rutabaga (peeled, chopped into thin matchsticks: ¼ inch thick and 3 inches long)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper

Directions:

Chili

- In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook the chopped onion 5-7 minutes until translucent. Add garlic and cook for a minute or less, until fragrant.
- Add remaining ingredients and cook until warm
- Crumble meatballs and add to sauce

Fries

- Bring a large pot of water to boil on the stove. Add rutabaga fries and boil for 12-15 minutes, until no longer crunchy.
- Remove and pat dry.
- Set air fryer to 400 and let it preheat for 2-3 minutes. Grease fryer racks or basket.
- In a large bowl toss fries olive oil, garlic powder, cumin, and sea salt.
- Transfer the fries to two racks for the air fryer in a single layer. Bake 10 minutes. Switch the top and bottom racks, then bake another 10-15 minutes until golden brown.
- For air fryers with a basket, you may need to do two batches. Arrange in a single layer in the basket and bake 20-25 minutes.



To serve: Top fries with chili and sprinkle with cheddar cheese and sliced green onions.

Cauliflower Crust Omelet Cups

Servings: 6 cups

Ingredients

- 1 head cauliflower
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp oregano
- 1/3 onion, diced
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 eggs, whisked
- 4 eggs, whisked
- Topping suggestions:
 - Tomato, basil, mozzarella
 - Spinach, mushroom, spinach
 - Broccoli, bacon, cheddar cheese

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375. Using a food processor, grate cauliflower until fine or riced. Transfer the riced cauliflower to a large microwave-safe bowl, sprinkle with salt, and microwave for 5 minutes. This will steam the cauliflower and help you remove the moisture. Allow cauliflower to cool and transfer into a second bowl lined with a thin towel. (Cheesecloth and paper towels will also work.) Wrap the cauliflower tightly and squeeze out the liquid. You may need to switch towels to ensure as much liquid has been removed as possible. Return cauliflower to your large bowl and add olive oil, garlic powder, onion, parmesan, oregano, salt, pepper, and 2 whisked eggs. Combine well.

Line a lightly greased muffin tin with the cauliflower mixture, using your fingers to press it firmly into the bottom and sides creating a crust. Bake for 20-30 minutes, until the crust turns golden brown. Pour four whisked eggs evenly into cauliflower cups, then add toppings of choice. Bake an additional 15-20 minutes or until eggs are cooked through. Allow to cool before serving.



Skinny Carrot Cake Pancakes

Ingredients

- ½ cup unsweetened applesauce
- 2 eggs
- 1/3 cup unsweetened almond milk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cup old fashioned rolled oats
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- Pinch of sea salt

Mix-ins:

- 1 cup shredded carrots
- ¼ cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- 3 Tbsp raisins
- Toppings: nut butter or Greek yogurt with fresh berries

Directions:

Place unsweetened applesauce, 2 eggs, 1/3 cup unsweetened almond milk, vanilla, honey, oats, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt into a blender and mix on high until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Remove from blender and stir in carrots, chopped nuts, and raisins.

Lightly coat a waffle griddle with coconut or olive oil over medium heat. Once it's hot, add 1/4 cup of batter to griddle. Cook 2-4 minutes until it's puffed up slightly and is cooked through.



Banana Split Overnight Chia

Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp chia seeds
- 1/3 cup unsweetened almond milk (or milk of choice)
- Sweetener of choice (or leave unsweetened): 2 tsp maple syrup, agave, honey, or stevia
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- Toppings: half of a banana, sliced, 3-4 sliced strawberries, ¼ cup pineapple tidbits, 2 Tbsp chopped pecans, granola, toasted coconut, cacao nibs, dark chocolate chips

Directions:

Add the first four ingredients (for the chia seed pudding) to a small container and mix vigorously, ensuring it's well-mixed with no clumps. Tip: Add the almond milk first, then stir in the chia seeds. Place in the refrigerator overnight. In the morning, add your toppings and dig in!

Smoothie: Green Monster/Hulk Juice

Ingredients

- 8 oz unsweetened almond milk
- 1-2 scoops protein powder (use amount on package directions) or ½ cup Greek yogurt
- 2 cups leafy greens
- ½ banana or ½ cup fresh/frozen strawberries, blueberries, or cherries
- ½ cup butternut squash
- 1 Tbsp hemp hearts, chia seeds, or ground flax



Veggie Mac and Cheese

Ingredients

- 1 cup carrots, diced (frozen, 1 cup cooked)
- 1 cup cauliflower florets (frozen, 1 cup cooked)
- 1 cup yellow squash, diced (frozen, 1 cup cooked)
- 1 lb macaroni, cooked al dente
- ½ cup water
- 1 cup 1%-milk
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 4 oz cream cheese

Directions:

Microwave veggies. Add to blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Return blended veggies to the pot over medium heat, and add the milk, cheese, and cream cheese. Stir until smooth. Add macaroni, reduce heat, mix thoroughly, cover and cook for 20 minutes. Enjoy!



Veggie Nuggets

Ingredients

- ½ cup grated carrots
- ½ cup broccoli florets
- ½ cup grated zucchini
- ¼ cup minced onion
- 1 garlic clove
- ½ cup chickpeas
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup seasoned breadcrumbs, divided
- ¾ cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 Tbsp Italian seasoning
- 1 tsp sea salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp olive oil + more for cooking



Directions:

Place shredded carrots, steamed broccoli, garlic, eggs, 1 cup of the breadcrumbs, cheese, onion powder, and black pepper in the food processor and pulse for 15 seconds or until well combined. Do not overmix! Mixture should form easily into a ball, wet but scoopable. If it's too crumbly, add water 1 tsp at a time until you have the right consistency.

Use a cookie scoop to form balls that are about 1 Tbsp each. (You should get about 25 nuggets.) Flatten slightly into round disks about ½ inch thick. Place remaining breadcrumbs in a shallow dish. Coat each veggie nugget with breadcrumbs. Heat oil in a skillet on medium-high heat until it sizzles when sprinkled with water droplets. Arrange nuggets in the skillet and cook about 4 minutes each side, or until golden brown and crispy.