Food, Fun & Games: Teaching Young Children About Food

Focus on "Vegetables"
Produced by the Public Health Nutrition Program
Fraser Health Authority
March 2005
(Revised June 2007)
# 'Focus on Vegetables' Nutrition Kit
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Backgrounder: Kids in the Kitchen

Refusing foods, insisting on the same foods every day, and taking what seems forever to finish a meal may be familiar scenes to you. Make no mistake - feeding children is a challenge. They have growing bodies bouncing with energy, little stomachs and strong wills! Involving children in the cooking experience is one way to combat mealtime mania. Children of all ages love to help out in the kitchen, especially if there is an attentive adult nearby! Cooking can be a wonderful experience for both adults and children, combining active learning and bonding. Taking part in the planning and preparation of food helps children to develop a sense of independence. At the same time, the experience gives them the opportunity to accomplish tasks that are ordinarily part of the grown-up world. Often, when a child has assisted in meal preparation, the food becomes more acceptable to eat.

Here are a few suggestions to help you get started with having the children in your care in your kitchen:

- Give simple tasks - take peas out of a pod, wash vegetables, and scoop out the seeds of a squash, toss a salad, tear some lettuce, slice a cucumber with a plastic knife- these activities build muscle coordination and dexterity.

- Spread some pizza dough in a small round cake pan, and let children create their own pizzas by adding tomato sauce, their choice of chopped vegetables, and some grated cheese.

- Try baking some squash or pumpkin seeds sprinkled with oil and seasonings in a toaster oven. Children can experience the results while they are still interested as the little oven heats up faster than the big one!

- Let the children spread fillings like cheese or nut butters onto celery sticks for snack. They could choose between raisins, sunflower seeds or chocolate chips as toppings.

- Keep talking. Tell children where the potatoes come from, how the cabbage is grown. Talk about locally grown foods; visit a local farm if you can. Try to include some ethnic foods to expand their horizons.

- Use food as art "subjects" by exploring with colours, forms and textures. Use the ideas in this unit on vegetables as a trampoline to bounce you into new realms!

Involving children in the kitchen takes your time and energy and often makes a mess! Make sure you are in the right frame of mind so that you will all enjoy the experience. Hands-on involvement with sounds, smells, textures and tastes of food as meals and snacks are prepared will increase children's willingness to eat a variety of foods.

Remember to make safety in the kitchen an important part of your teaching. Younger children require the supervision of an adult in the kitchen.

(Article adapted from Food Flair for Child Care, Winter 2000, Parent Insert. BC Ministry of Health.)
**Backgrounder: Kids in the Kitchen**

**Two to three year olds can safely:**
- Stir with a large spoon.
- Use a butter knife to spread soft fillings (like onto a piece of celery).
- Mash boiled, cooled vegetables.
- Combine salad ingredients in a large bowl using a large spoon or their freshly washed hands.
- Practice using whisks, spatulas, strainers, colanders, wooden spoons and rolling pins.

**Three to Four year olds can safely:**
- Use plastic measuring spoons and cups marked to the proper amounts.
- Combine salad ingredients using forks or spatulas.
- Move chopped vegetables into containers with large openings such as colanders or wide-mouth bowls.

**Four to five year olds can safely:**
- Be taught to use vegetable peelers.
- With close supervision, cut flat ingredients such as sliced cucumbers or mushrooms with a plastic serrated knife.

**When cooking with mixed age groups:**
- Always give cooking projects your complete attention. If using cutting utensils, limit groups to two or three children. Offer other children alternate cooking tasks while they wait for a turn.
- Bring materials to the children’s level. Keep children away from the stove.
- Pre-cut vegetables into thin strips. This will help to support children’s early attempts at making salads.
- Allow children to hold plastic serrated knives only when they have something to cut. As soon as a child finishes cutting remove the knife or offer additional materials.
- Keep sharp objects out of sight as well as out of reach of toddlers.
- Gather materials and ingredients in advance. Keep them handy so children won’t have to wait unnecessarily. When preparing food, let the youngest children go first.
- Include families in your activities where possible- e.g.- invite children to bring a favourite vegetable from their home to add to a salad; invite available parents to join in a picnic.

Vegetables - Gross Motor Skill Games

**Carrot, Carrot, Corn**
(Like: Duck, Duck, Goose)
Have children sit in a circle. One child is chosen to walk around the circle tapping heads - carrot, carrot, etc. When child taps and says corn, that child jumps up and runs around, as first child runs the other way. First one to sit in the vacated spot stays. Child remaining begins tapping carrot, carrot, etc.

**Potato Hop**
Cut ten large potato shapes out of brown construction paper and number them from 1 to 10. Tape the shapes to the floor in the proper sequence. Then let the children take turns hopping from one potato to the other as everyone recites the rhyme.

“One potato, two potato, three potato, four, five potato, six potato, seven potato more. Eight potato, nine potato, here is ten, now let’s start all over again.”

**Five Tiny Green Peas**
Divide the children into groups of five and have the children lie on the floor, as small as they can get, all in a row. Then, say this rhyme as they begin to grow...and POP!

“Five tiny green peas, lying in a row Inside a small green pod, one day began to grow They grew and they grew and they didn’t stop Until one day their pod went “POP!””

**We are Making Vegetable Soup**
(Tune: London Bridges)
We are making vegetable soup, vegetable soup, vegetable soup, we are making vegetable soup now put in the (vegetable of choice).

Take the ________and stir it up, stir it up, stir it up, take the ________and stir it up while making vegetable soup.
Vegetables - Gross Motor Skill Games

Dramatic Play Area

- Plastic gardening tools for kids such as a wheelbarrow, rake, spade, etc.
- Picnic cloth and basket, plastic vegetables, plates, etc.
- Flamboyant assortment of gardening gloves and sun hats
- Assorted baskets - wicker or plastic

Build a Scarecrow

Ask children to bring things from home they could use to help build a scarecrow. Things like mismatched mittens, old baby shoes, a scarf, an old coat, plaid pants, and a hat. You could use some newspaper, extra clothes or batting for stuffing. Be creative!

Growing Our Garden

Have half of the children crouching in tight balls on the floor, all in a row (they are the seeds!). The other children should be standing (they will be the water and the sun).

- We've planted the seeds row by row (water and sun children pretend to pat the earth on top of the seeds). Now we'll watch our seeds grow.
- A little bit of rain (water and sun children make rain drop motions with their hands), Drip drop drip.
- A little bit of sun (water and sun children raise hands above their heads like the sun). Soon our garden will be done.
- Grow seeds grow (water and sun children keep doing rain and sun motions).
- Grow seeds grow (seeds children start to grow from crouched balls to large).
- Sun, rain, sun, rain (stretching plants).
- Grow seeds grow!
- Grow seeds grow!
Vegetables - Things To Do And Make

**Vegetables - Things To Do And Make**

**Grow Some Sprouts**
Plant some veggie seeds in muffin cups.

**Veggie Seed Sorting**
Buy an assortment of vegetable seeds. Sort by color, texture and size.

**Veggie Prints**
- Cut various veggies in half and use them to dip into paint and use as printers, e.g. bell peppers, celery, carrots.

**Potato Block Printing**
- Cut shapes into potato halves making design raised. Dip into paint and stamp on paper.

**Creative Painting**
- Use carrot tops and celery leaves as paintbrushes.

**Vegetable Pictures**
Have outlines of various types of vegetables drawn on paper. Fill in with assorted seeds or dried peas/beans.

**Field Trips at Harvest Time**
- Going on a farm tour is a great way to introduce children to the idea of “where food comes from”. They can see fruit on a tree, vegetables in the garden, and chickens in a barn. (Visit [www.aitc.ca/bc](http://www.aitc.ca/bc) - click on “farm tours”)
- Field trip to a grocery store - produce section. (Visit [www.saveonfoods.com](http://www.saveonfoods.com) and register online to book a ‘Kids’ Shop Smart Tour’.
- Field trip to a Community Garden.
Vegetables - Things To Do And Make

Mystery Food Game

Materials: You will need a variety of foods ready to put into the 'mystery food tin. You could use a banana, a kiwi, a mango, some pasta, a hard bread stick or some nuts. And, you will need a Mystery Food Tin!

How to Make a Mystery Tin:
Materials: One large coffee can; a sock; masking tape or glue OR a shoe bag with a drawstring.

- Take the plastic lid off a large tin. Cut off the top portion of a sock and place over the open end of the can. Secure the sock along the edge of the can, using glue or masking tape. Decorate the tin with colourful food pictures. OR Use a shoe bag with a drawstring.

How to Play the Game:
Have the children sit in a circle. Put one food into the 'Mystery Tin' without the children seeing. Tell the children which food group the food is from.

1. Feel the food. Pass the tin around and instruct the children to put one hand into the tin without peeking and feel the food. Tell them not to tell anyone else what it is - it’s a secret. The tin is passed from child to child until everyone has had a chance to feel the food. Then ask the children how does it feel? What shape is it? What foods feel like this? What might it be?

2. Identify the food. Remove the food from the tin. What is it? Have you eaten it before? How? Where?

Variation: Put three foods outside the Mystery Tin. Children guess which of the three is inside.

3. Look at the food. What colour is the food? How does it feel? What shape is it? Where does it come from? How does it grow (on a tree, a vine, on the ground, underground)? What part of the plant is it, leaf, stem, flower, seed, or root? Repeat this process for each food item.

4. Cut the food. Once the foods have been identified and discussed or after each food, wash and/or peel it, then chop it into bite-size pieces for tasting. Ask the children does it have a skin, a core, seeds, a stone or a pit, sections. Is it moist, or dry?

Offer each child a taste of the food. Ask them how it feels in their mouth. (Crunchy, soft, chewy.) Ask them to describe how it sounds when they eat it. Ask them what they like about the taste of the food.

If the mystery food is something that must be cooked, e.g., pasta, kidney beans or lentils, have a prepared dish for tasting.

5. Have the children as a group compose a letter to parents, or audio tape their story, or draw a picture to tell about this food.
Vegetable Soup Song

(Sung to: Farmer in the Dell)

Children stand in a circle.
One child is broth. Each child chooses the name of a vegetable. The leader pretends to stir the large pot in the centre of the circle.

Song: The soup is boiling up, the soup is boiling up, stir slow-around we go, the soup is boiling up.

- First we add the broth, first we add the broth, stir slow-around we go, the soup is boiling up.
- Now we add some _______ (the leader calls out what vegetable gets added to the pot. Child with that vegetable name joins the pot!) now we add some _____, stir slow-around we go, the soup is boiling up.
- Continue with whichever vegetables children have named. Have all the children in the centre around a large imaginary pot pretending to stir the soup.

Vegetables

(Sung to: Mary Had A Little Lamb)

- We are pumpkins, big and round, big and round, big and round. We are pumpkins big and round, seated on the ground.
- We are string beans, green and fine (repeat). Growing on a vine.
- We are onions, round and white (repeat). We make soup taste right.
- We are carrots, orange and long (repeat). Help us sing our song.
- We are cabbage, green or red (repeat). See our funny head.
- We are corn stalks, tall and straight (repeat). Don't we just taste great!

The Good Food Song

(Sung to: Old MacDonald Had A Farm)

Vegetables are good for me, EE I EE I O
And so I eat them happily, EE I EE I O
(Children take turns naming vegetables that they like)
With a carrot, carrot, here, and a carrot, carrot, there. Here a carrot, there a carrot, everywhere a carrot, carrot.
Vegetables are good for me, EE I EE I O
Meet The Veggies Rhyme

Tomato: I'm round and red and juicy too. Chop me for a salad, or dump me in your stew!

Lettuce: Hey, wait a minute! if it's a salad you're fixin'. I can stand alone, no need for the mixin'!

Onion: Chop me and slice me but keep water near. I sometimes get juicy and can bring on a tear!

Carrot: Orange is my color I stand long and lean. In the garden you'll see just my bright leaves of green.

Pea: I live in a pod with so many others. I think I was born with one hundred brothers!

Green Bean: Look in the garden you'll see my sign. Then bring out your basket when it's pickin' time!

Potato: I've an eye for perfection to give you the best. Baked, mashed or fried, I'll pass the test!

Cabbage: My head is quite thick - so people tell me. I guess that's the reason grocery stores sell me!

Celery: Cut and rinse my stalks, then spread on cream cheese. A refreshing snack to make parties a breeze!

Squash: Some call me a game, a game of good sport. But I'm ready to eat as a side dish of sorts!

Brussel Sprout: I'm kinda cute when I'm served on a plate. I'm just a little mouthful; you can eat six or eight!

Cauliflower: I carry white flowers to break off and eat. I'm sometimes served raw, a nutritious snack treat!

Broccoli: My friends call me trees, now that's a funny name. Though I am dark green, with stalks just the same.

We're the veggies you should eat every day!

Now don't make a face, we're as good as we say!

5 Little Pumpkins

Glue/sew velcro loops on the tips of a black mitt. Glue velcro on 5 orange pom-poms. Attach pom-poms to the glove to start the finger play. Remove one at a time and place in front of you. When the wind goes whoosh - swipe the pumpkins away!

5 Little Pumpkins sitting on a gate

The 1st one said, "my it's getting late"

The 2nd one said, "there are witches in the air"

The 3rd one said, "but we don't care"

The 4th one said, "let's run and run"

The 5th one said, "it's only night time fun"

Then whoosh went the wind, and out went the light, and the 5 little pumpkins rolled out of sight!
**Pot of Homemade Vegetable Soup**  
(35 minutes - Serves: 6)

1 cup water*  
1 ½ Tbsp dry pinto beans*  
1 ½ cups water  
1 qt vegetable or chicken broth  
2 tbsp dry lentils  
¼ cup pearled barley  
¼ cup onions, diced  
½ cup fresh carrots, diced  
¼ cup fresh celery, diced  
½ cup fresh white potatoes, peeled, cubed  
1 Tbsp tomato paste  
½ tsp white pepper  
½ cup frozen corn  
½ cup frozen cut green beans  
½ cup fresh cabbage, shredded (optional)  

1. *Soak Beans:*  
   **Overnight Method:** Add 1 cup of cold water to dry pinto beans. Cover and let stand in a refrigerator overnight. Discard the water and rinse beans.  
   **Quick-soak Method:** Bring 1 cup of water to a boil. Add dry pinto beans and boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to soak for 1 hour. Discard the water and rinse beans.  

2. In a large saucepan, bring 1 ½ cups of water and vegetable or chicken broth to a boil.  
3. Add soaked pinto beans, lentils, barley, onions, carrots, celery, potatoes, tomato paste, and white pepper. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes.  
4. Add corn, green beans, and cabbage and simmer, covered, for 15 minutes.

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**Fruit and Vegetable Mix Up**  
(15 minutes - Serves 6)

½ head red or green cabbage  
1-16oz can fruit cocktail  
1 cup yoghurt - plain  
Juice of a lemon  
½ cup honey  
½ cup vinegar  
1 banana - sliced  
½ tsp salt  
1/8 tsp pepper  
3 Tbsp almonds, slivered (optional)  

1. **Shred** cabbage  
2. **Combine** remaining ingredients and sprinkle with nuts.  
3. **Enjoy!**

(From: Food, Family & Fun, US Dept. of Agriculture)
Vegetables & Dip

Provide an assortment of vegetables for children to dip into vegetable dip. Children can help by slicing washed mushrooms with a disposable plastic knife, or by slicing precut pieces of peppers and cucumber. Try to offer a variety of colors, textures and shapes, and have some familiar and less familiar vegetables to offer.

50's Style Dip!

1 cup sour cream
¼ pkg Onion Soup Mix
Mix and serve.

Basil Dip

1/3 cup low-fat mayo
2 Tbsp milk
1 tsp onion powder
1 Tbsp fresh basil, chopped
Mix and serve.

Curry Mango Dip!

1 cup sour cream
2 Tbsp curry
2 Tbsp mango chutney
Mix and serve.

Hummus (Chick Pea Dip)

19 oz. can chickpeas, drained
2-4 large cloves garlic
½ cup fresh lemon juice
½ cup tahini (sesame seed paste)
½ tsp salt
freshly ground pepper
½ cup low-fat plain yogurt

In blender, puree chickpeas, garlic, lemon juice, tahini, and seasonings until smooth. Stir in yoghurt until well combined.

Options: add 2 green onions and ½ tsp ground cumin.
Replace tahini with peanut butter. Omit yogurt.
Books for Children:
About Fruit and Vegetables

Johnny Appleseed plants seeds that grow into trees.

The pages, ten fruits, one monkey in search of the perfect lunch make this a charming read-aloud tale that helps children learn the numbers from one to ten. (Ages 1-4).

Describes how to plant and grow a variety of colorful vegetables, including red corn, yellow watermelons, and multi-colored radishes.

An alphabet or common and uncommon fruits and vegetables, from apple to zucchini, including huckleberry, jicama, radicchio, and xigua, is beautifully illustrated.

In brightly-colored collage illustrations, a father and child share the simple joys of planting, watering, and watching seeds grow in their garden. Then they cook them all up into a delicious vegetable soup, the recipe for which is included. (Ages 4-8).

A mushroom grows bigger and bigger to provide shelter for animals in the rain.

The author describes a day in the life of Frannie's fruit stand, which sells fruits, vegetables, and flowers on Highway 57.

A tiny seed grows into a huge carrot.
Books for Children: About Fruit and Vegetables Cont.

   A snail lives on and eats a cabbage while growing too large to move when the cabbage is gone.

   People and bears both enjoy a blueberry harvest.

   Peter raids a farmer's garden and almost gets caught.

   When he gets too old to climb up the ladder, Mr. Putter and his cat Tabby figure out an ingenious way to pick pears for pear jelly. (Ages 4-8).

   Apples, pears, pumpkins, corn, and grains are harvested.

   Apples, pears, and grapes make a wonderful gift for mothers.
How To Wash Your Hands

1. Wet Hands
2. Soap
3. Rub
4. Rinse
5. Towel Dry

Always wash hands:
- Before handling food
- Before mealtimes
- Before giving medicine
- Before applying ointment
- After toileting
- After changing diapers
- After cleaning up body fluids
- After caring for a sick child
- After playing with or petting animals
## Resource Order Form

Available from the Public Health Nutrition Program
(No Charge)

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Fax your order form to:
- Public Health Nutrition Program: 604-591-7382

Or mail to: Public Health Nutrition Program
3rd Floor, 11245 - 84th Avenue
Delta BC V4C 2L9

Include your name, full mailing address & phone number

NAME: __________________________________________________________________________

ADDRESS: _______________________________________________________________________

CITY: _______________ POSTAL CODE: _______________

PHONE NO.: (     ) _____________________________________________
Companion Kit
'Focus on Fruit' - Order Form

- I would like to receive the 'Focus on Fruit' Nutrition Kit

- Send order to: Public Health Nutrition Program
  3rd Floor, 11245 - 84th Avenue
  Delta BC V4C 2L9

Include your name, full mailing address & phone number

NAME: ____________________________________________

ADDRESS: ________________________________________

CITY: ___________________________ POSTAL CODE: ___________________________

PHONE NO.: (___) ______
'Focus on Vegetables’ Nutrition Kit Evaluation Form

Name of Evaluator: ________________________ Date: ______________

Address: _______________________________ City____________________

Postal Code: ____________________________ Phone Number: ______________

Organization: _______________________________________________

Please take a minute to tell us impressions of this teaching kit.

- Overall, did you find the kit:
  Very Helpful □    Helpful □    Not at all helpful □

- Do you have any suggestions to improve the kit?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

- What was particularly helpful in the kit?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Thank you,

- Please fax this evaluation to:
  Public Health Nutrition Program
  604-591-7382

- Or mail to:
  3rd Fl, 11245 84th Avenue
  Delta, BC  V4C 2L9