

CRUNCH BITES PODCAST

BITE SIZED CHILDREN'S NUTRITION INFO

Episode 6 - How to create little veggie lovers.

Mikala: Hello, and welcome to Crunch Bites, a podcast for parents where we discuss all things children's nutrition and inspire you to build those healthy habits in the home. Join us as we chat about picky eating, reaching for rainbow foods, packing school lunches that actually get eaten, and so much more. Brought to you by Crunch and Sip and presented by Qualified Nutritionists. This podcast is packed with goodness and full of fresh ideas.

Nicole: Hi, everyone, and welcome to today's episode. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we're recording on today, the Whadjuk people from the Noongar Nation, and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. I would also like to recognize that you may be listening from other lands across the nation and pay our respects to the elder's past, present, and future across all these lands.

Mikala: Thanks, Nic. This episode is brought to you by Beetroot. Beetroot is packed with essential nutrients. Beetroot is a really fantastic source of fibre, folate, manganese, potassium, iron, and vitamin C. It is a powerhouse vegetable. Beetroot or beetroot juice has incredible health benefits, such as improving our blood flow, lowering our blood pressure, and even increasing exercise performance. There are a really vast array of beetroot dips on offer in the shops these days, and they range from being a little bit sharp to a little bit creamy, and they're absolutely delicious spread inside a homemade burger or just even in a little pot with some veggie sticks to dip in.

Nicole: I must admit, beetroot is one of those vegetables that I'm still trying to learn to love. It's not one of my favourites, but I know because of all the amazing health benefits that it has, I am really trying to teach myself to learn to like it. So that actually sounds like a really great starting point is those dips and spreading a little bit on different burgers or meals.

Mikala: Well done practicing what we preach there, Nic.

Nicole: Exactly. So, with only 5% of West Aussie kids getting enough veggies each day, we decided to dedicate today's episode to talking about veggies. We're going to shine a light on why it's important to increase the number of serves we have each day and talk about some really practical ways we can include more throughout the day for our children. So first off, how many vegetables should kids be aiming to eat each day?

Mikala: So, I think we talk about the messaging, five serves of veggies every day, and obviously that's the end goal. But when it comes to younger kids in that four to eight age range, they're still developing their tummies and they don't have the same capacity as when they're that little bit older. So, we sort of aim for that four serves, four up to five for that younger age range. And then above eight, roughly, we start talking about five serves. And I think it's important to note that some days you're simply just not going to reach this target and that's completely fine. We always say do your best. Some is great, more is better. And adding a handful here and there into your kids day is beneficial at any time.

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Nicole: So, when you say five serves, what does this mean? What does a serve look like?

Mikala: A serve of veggies is either one cup of what we would say, you know, typical salad vegetables. So, things like your lettuce, your spinach, your tomatoes, or half a cup of cooked vegetables. And that's because once we cook veggies, they condense down. So, what would take up half a cup is equivalent to that full cup of the raw salad veggies. It's also things like one whole carrot, a medium tomato, or a medium potato. And then also remembering things like lentils and legumes, which are vegetables, plant foods as well. So, half a cup of either of those is a serve too.

Nicole: Yeah, lentils and legumes are often forgotten, but they're quiet little powerhouse foods, really, because they fit into our vegetable category and have all of those great benefits of vegetables, but they are also high in protein. So, they're a really good substitute for meat as well.

Mikala: Yeah, that's right. And they're often so affordable too.

Nicole: Yeah, yeah, definitely. So, they're really important, particularly in this economic climate to remember. So often we think about serving vegetables, we think of adding them to dinner. But if we're trying to cram five serves of vegetables into one meal by the end of the day, it's just not going to happen. So how can we guarantee a little bit more success on getting extra veg into kids day?

Mikala: Yeah, I think that's a really good point, Nic, that kids have little tummies, so they are going to need more meals on a smaller scale across the day. And exactly as you said, trying to have five serves in one sitting in any of the main meals is not realistic, and it's just going to set up a battle, which we don't want. So, we always suggest that we spread those serves of veggies out across the day and include them at lots of different times and in lots of different ways. And the benefit of this as well is that it leans towards building those healthy habits because you've got more chance of getting the required serves in, but you've also got repeat exposure and more opportunities to show veggies in a vast array and in a variety of meals and snacks. It gives kids lots of opportunities to taste and try, and it just removes that pressure. So, actually spreading them out across the day is a really nice way to allow that process to be a lot more enjoyable for everyone.

Nicole: Yeah, and it makes it easier for you as well because you're not stressed about getting all those serves into dinner time.

Mikala: Yeah, exactly right.

Nicole: So, when we think about five serves, that does seem like quite a lot. Why should we be eating five serves of vegetables? Why is it important that we're trying to get as much vegetables into our children's day as possible?

Mikala: Veggies are a really important core food group. They are absolutely jam-packed with so many of the good things that we want our kids to be eating. They're so high in fibre, which is incredibly important for digestion and for optimal gut health. They're full of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, antioxidants. They are just so good for keeping our bodies healthy. That means things like keeping school bugs at bay because they'll lead to strong immune systems, preventing future disease, and also helping with healthy growth and development, which obviously is our prime focus as our kids are growing. Veggies are also a really cheap and great way to extend a meal and help fill up those tummies. They're much more sustainable. They take the pressure off the food industry because obviously farming meats has a really big environmental

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impact and that's input and output. You know, think about things like methane gas. They could also even be something that you're able to grow yourself, which further feeds into that sustainability discussion. But also most importantly, and let's not forget this point, veggies are absolutely delicious. They add colour, they add flavour, they add texture to meals. They're actually a food that we want our kids to be reaching for because it's a really enjoyable experience when they are part of the food that we're eating.

Nicole: I think that's a really important point. A lot of people forget that veggies do add flavour and colour and they can be a really star of any meal. So, we do need to remember that they are not only good for us, but they can taste and look amazing as well. So, you mentioned that vegetables are a cheap and great way to extend meals. So obviously with your point about growing them yourself, that can be quite an affordable way of getting more veggies into the day. What other ways can we make vegetables more affordable?

Mikala: There's probably three main ways that we talk about when we discuss this with parents, because affordability is a really important issue. Food budgeting is, you know, at the top of everyone's list at the moment. So, we're having this conversation quite often and, you know, it starts with buying seasonally. So, we really encourage parents to look at what is in season at the moment, because when it is in season, it will be in abundance. And when things are in abundance, they are going to be cheaper, more affordable, priced more competitively. They're also if they're seasonal, likely to be local, which means that they'll be fresher and tastier because they'll have travelled less from farm to fork. We also encourage parents to look at buying in bulk. So really having a look at that cost per kilo on the tags in the supermarket, buying the bigger packets, the less perfect varieties will always save you money at the checkout. And then looking at long life as well. So don't just think that fresh is best because the frozen and the tinned and the canned is often on par in terms of nutrients because it's usually snap frozen or jarred or tinned straight from being picked. So, it can also, you know, fill those meals, and save you money.

Nicole: Yeah, there's some really great tips, particularly if we think back to a couple of years ago when our supply chain was really quite affected and fresh was just in very limited supply. So, buying in seasonal and really relying on a lot of long life was really important to make sure we kept our vegetable consumption up. So, there's some really fantastic tips to keep costs down.

Mikala: Just building on that as well, I think it's important to acknowledge that if you live regionally, long life might be your only option most of the time anyway. And so just reinforcing the fact that that's actually a really good option and that people can still cook and enjoy delicious, nutritious meals when long life is something that you have to reach for more often than not.

Nicole: Yeah, exactly. One of my favourite meals to make is Mexican beans and it uses pretty much all long-life ingredients. So, some tinned beans and some tinned corn, some tomato paste and some different spices. If I'm lucky enough to have some fresh avocado or lime in the fridge, I'll add those for a little bit of extra flavour as well. But the basics of the meal is all long life. So really great options.

Mikala: Sounds great.

Nicole: So, we talk about getting five serves of veggies into the day. Can we discuss some real examples that we can give listeners on how we can include more serves of veggies into different snacks and meals?

Mikala: Yeah, definitely. So, there's plenty of examples that we can give and it could be as simple as remembering that veggies are

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a really great snack. So, serving them just as they are, a tray of veggie sticks and a nice veggie dip, serving them in a really yummy salad to go alongside a meal or sautéing them or roasting them when it's the cooler month. Remembering to, you know, top or fill sandwiches or wraps with extra veggies whenever you can, because they just add flavour and crunch and bulk to the food that we're eating. And then, you know, not forgetting some of those really important incidental opportunities like bringing a container of veggies with you when you go to school pick up so that kids can munch on them on the way home while they're quite hungry. Bringing them on a trip on a train or when you're waiting in a doctor's room, just giving kids an opportunity to reach for them more often makes a difference because it all adds up. And then, you know, you've got things like grating extra veggies into fritters or into some savoury muffins, grating or finely dicing into curries or spaghetti bolognese, or even adding some into the smoothies that you make for afternoon tea.

Nicole: Yeah, there's some really great examples. So, those incidental exposures to those vegetables can be really great options. So, when kids are hungriest or there's not much else to do, so those long road trips, it's really great to have veggies on hand and the container of veggies will be gone before you know it if the thing that's on offer.

Mikala: Definitely.

Nicole: So, the last three items or food options you mentioned, so fritters, grating it into curries and spaghetti or putting it into smoothies, they are all somewhat, I guess, hiding vegetables. Is this an okay option to do?

Mikala: Yeah. So, in one of our other episodes, we touch on this. We talk about fussy feeding and food aversion. And in particular, we talk about this topic of hiding those veggies. And what we say is that, obviously, including them in this way in as many opportunities, meal or snack opportunities as you can is great because it will boost serves across the day. But we do want to make sure that the veggies that we serve are not always hidden. We really need to give kids a chance to learn what they love, to actually see veggies, smell veggies, touch them, taste them, and really develop those preferences. At the same time, they can also then identify the veggies that they don't like as much and then go through a journey of figuring out better ways to enjoy or other ways to serve those particular veggies. We need our kids to have really positive associations with food. And not lumping all the veggies in one basket is one way to achieve that because they can really be drawn to those that they enjoy. We also know that if you're serving veggies in their true form and kids are able to sort of see them, they also then get the opportunity to watch you enjoying an array of veggies. So, there's that modelling and copying space that can occur because the veggies are actually there on the table for little hands to reach for. And at the same time, remembering that when you're in that environment with your kids, talk about the veggies that you love, talk about what you taste, you know, develop those positive associations with them. But yeah, I suppose the main point here is make sure the veggies are not always hidden because this gives your kids a chance to learn what they love.

Nicole: Yeah, so we really want to make sure we're celebrating vegetables, giving kids the opportunity to try vegetables and learn to love them. So, Mikala, what are some of your favourite ways to eat your vegetables?

Mikala: Well, there's too many for me to list. Like I really am a true advocate for veggies and I think anyone that knows me well knows that I am a big fan of a salad. I truly believe that all great stories start with a salad. But my, you know, my salads are not what you would typically think of in the sort of light or, you know, iceberg lettuce driven. I love a salad that's like a meal that's got, you know, some wild rice stirred through and some nuts and seeds and, you know, roasted veggies and, you know, hard-boiled eggs or tuna from a tin or ways to sort of really fill you up. But with a

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good hearty salad is probably my favourite way. And, you know, we often then kind of lean into a cuisine when we do that in our house. So, it might be a really beautiful Asian salad or a lovely Mediterranean salad. So, yeah, I'd have to say that a salad as a meal is how we get most of them in most of the time.

Nicole: Yeah, that sounds delicious. Often salads get a bad rap as rabbit food, but they can definitely be a fantastic meal, standalone by themselves or can be a highlight to an additional part of a meal as well. So, on the side, I am a big fan of roasted vegetables. So, I absolutely love roasting a tray of whatever vegetables I have in the fridge. But another way I get veggies into my day is by making smoothies. So quite often if I'm even if I'm making a fruit smoothie, I'll add in some different vegetables. So sometimes a handful of spinach into my berry smoothie or if I'm making a banana and mango smoothie, add in a bit of avocado, which makes it super creamy. Or one of my other favourite combinations is banana, peanut butter and chickpeas. This is a really delicious smoothie that gets super creamy. And I know I'm getting extra serves of veg into my day.

Mikala: And as you said before, you're also boosting your protein because of that chickpea component.

Nicole: Yeah, exactly. It's a winning-winning combo.

Mikala: Yum. They sound delicious.

Nicole: So, if you could summarise today's episode with a few key takeaways for our parents who are listening, what would they be?

Mikala: They would probably be, at the end of the day, let's make veggies the star of the show. Let's start celebrating them, cooking and serving them in a variety of ways. You know, really enjoy all the different flavours that can come from them. You know, serve them as the bulk of or the main part of most of the meals that you're serving up rather than as a side or an afterthought or out of some sense of obligation that you should be getting them because they're healthy. Really celebrate them because there's so many delicious ways to learn to love our veggies. And then probably the importance of eating seasonally. I think we need to remember that when we eat seasonal produce, it tastes better. It's, you know, got a better environmental footprint. It's going to be more affordable and it also gives you a really great opportunity to try different things across the year because different veggies are in season and available across the different seasons.

Nicole: Yeah, there's some really great points and key takeaways for our listeners. We know that particularly with vegetables, it can be one of those points where children that are a bit fussier with eating, it can be one of those sticky points. So, if this is the case for you, one of our episodes we go into, we touch on fussy eating and we have a particular focus on vegetables. So, make sure you check that out if this is a topic you're interested in. If you enjoyed today's episode, please like, comment, and share, and also get in touch if there's any other topics you would love to hear more about.

Mikala: Thanks, everyone. Lovely to have a chat.

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