



Did You Know most people don't get the recommended 2 ½ - 3 cups of vegetables per day?

Learn more in the following Q&A with Sharon Palmer, RDN, a dietitian and nutritionist who has great advice on packing more veggies into your diet in tasty and easy ways.



Q: What are your favorite tips for getting younger kids to eat more veggies?

- Expose them to veggies! Studies show that if you expose kids to veggies— simply place them on their plate or at the table—they become more familiar with them and are more likely to try them. Don't assume they won't *ever* try them!
- Let kids get interactive with veggies. That means letting them cook in the kitchen with kid-friendly vegetable recipes, such as veggies on pizza, veggie appetizers such as a basket full of crudité's, or adding veggies to a pasta sauce. Another way to get kids interactive with veggies is to include menu ideas that have an activity; such as dipping vegetable sticks (jicama, celery, carrot, snow peas) into a dip.
- Get creative. Let a blank plate be a canvas for kids to create broccoli "trees", cauliflower "clouds", and yellow squash "daisies".
- Get up close and personal with veggies. Let your kids grow a green bean plant in a pot—a really fun exercise. Visit the farmers market where kids can try all sorts of produce and even talk to farmers who grew the food.
- Don't be afraid to "hide" veggies. Studies show that this can work! Although I don't recommend ONLY hiding veggies, you can get more of these healthy foods into the diet by mixing them into breads, muffins, pancakes (zucchini, carrots); pasta sauces (onions, celery, peppers, carrots); and smoothies (greens, carrots, beets, celery).

Q: Do you have any favorite super-fast veggie-packed dinners for weeknights when you only have 20 minutes but don't want to order out?

A: My kids love my curried vegetable dish. I quickly sauté whatever fresh veggies I have on hand, such as onions, peppers, celery, carrots, and summer squash. Then I season it with garlic, ginger, garam masala (an Indian spice blend), canned tomatoes, and lite coconut milk. You can add cubed chicken or tofu to the mixture, depending on your family's preference. I serve this over whole grain basmati rice. They love this meal, and you can cook it fast! My [Orange Peanut Tempeh Stir-Fry with Red Rice](http://sharonpalmer.com/post-r.php?s=2013-10-16-orange-peanut-tempeh-stir-fry-with-red-rice) <http://sharonpalmer.com/post-r.php?s=2013-10-16-orange-peanut-tempeh-stir-fry-with-red-rice> is another fast, family-approved meal.



Q: What are your favorite veggie-loaded ways to use canned salmon and/or tuna?

A: My family's favorite way to enjoy canned tuna is in a classic comfort food, tuna noodle casserole. I like to include a bright, flavorful vegetable when I do pasta dishes like this, such as green peas or broccoli. I make my own quick white sauce, thickening milk (or plant-based milk if preferred) with a bit of flour and seasoning it with a touch of olive oil, garlic, herbs (i.e. dill, basil, or oregano), and a pinch of black pepper and sea salt. Just boil up the pasta with the veggies included for about 8 minutes (not overcooked). Drain pasta and veggies and stir in white sauce and tuna. Place in a casserole dish in the oven and bake for 30 minutes until bubbly and golden.

Q: So many people were raised on over-steamed, mushy veggies. What preparation method do you think is the best for converting mush-fearful people into veggie believers?

A: I think this is a major stumbling block for people learning to love veggies—they didn't have good ones when growing up! My favorite way to cook vegetables is the Mediterranean way. I simply sauté any fresh vegetable in a touch of olive oil and a splash of water until crisp-tender. You can add garlic, herbs, and a pinch of sea salt, too.

Another way is roasting vegetables; this brings out all of the wonderful caramelized flavors! Simply place any vegetable in a dish, drizzle with a tiny bit of olive oil and add seasonings as desired. Place in the oven on the top rack and cook at 375 degrees for about 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the vegetable, until golden brown and tender.

Q: In addition to main courses, we also love a great veggie-laden side dish. Can you tell us some of your favorites and/or any tricks you have for the best way jazz up a veggie side?

A: I love to sauté whole grains, such as cooked wheat berries, farro, rice, or quinoa, with a bit of olive oil, garlic, onions, and another vegetable, such as asparagus or zucchini. My kids love this, and it's easy! Pasta dishes are always so delicious with an addition of veggies, such as tomatoes, spinach, or summer squash.

Q: And finally . . . if you could only eat one veggie for the rest of your life, which one would you choose (and why)?

A: That's a tough one! I love them all! But I simply can't live without green leafy vegetables, such as kale, spinach, arugula, and romaine. I eat a deep green fresh salad every day. My refrigerator ALWAYS contains a deep green leafy vegetable.