

# FitFUTURE

Strategies for  
Better Living.

## Don't Deceive Kids at the Dinner Table



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**S**neaking vegetables into your kids' food so they won't know they're in there? Are you spending extra time pureeing and hiding veggies into your meals? After an onslaught of cookbooks encouraging this practice, many parents have resorted to these sneaky methods. Unfortunately, these recipes come up short on vegetables, don't taste great, and are not doing anything to teach and reinforce sustainable healthy eating habits in children.

While some may applaud this concept and encourage parents to do whatever it takes, most nutrition and child health experts worry that over-doing the 'stealth' approach sends several negative messages. These covert strategies may have the following negative effects:

- Reinforces the notion that vegetables taste so bad that they have to be hidden.
- Validates "deception." Trickery erodes trust. Sooner or later, children realize they are being tricked and feel hurt and angry.

- Sets children back in their ability to learn and grow. Early childhood is a critical time for palate development. Children miss out on the opportunity to acquire a taste for vegetables and other healthy foods.

So what should parents do? Children should see what the vegetable looks, and tastes like, or they'll never learn to eat it. What's the point of hiding a carrot or a floret of broccoli? If the child enjoys it, he won't know that he likes carrots or broccoli. Parents should not be obsessing about getting certain foods into children - they should be focusing on trusting children to push themselves along to learn and enjoy healthy foods.

A parent's job is to provide and prepare healthy foods. The child's job is to choose from the foods provided by parents. Nutrition experts recommend giving your kids time and

multiple opportunities to enjoy vegetables. Frequent exposure makes kids eat better, not begging, pleading or threatening them. Studies show that pressure doesn't work. When you bribe or force children to eat certain foods, they like those foods even less.

You may not believe it, but getting children to eat vegetables just isn't that difficult. Vegetables are delicious and beautiful. Parents should highlight them, not hide them. Engage your kids in selecting and preparing vegetables - it's a good way to make veggies more appealing. Taking trips to farmers markets, and growing your own vegetable garden can help too.

Channel your energy into making vegetables more appealing to kids, rather than pureeing them and hiding them. Of course there is nothing wrong with boosting the nutrient density of the foods kids eat such as adding grated carrots to meatloaf or diced bell peppers to pasta sauce, or squash to mac & cheese - but children should clearly see vegetables on the dinner plate each evening too.

