

SNEAKING VEGGIES INTO CHILDREN'S DIETS

GET OUT THE FOOD PROCESSOR FOR A STEALTH VEGGIE SAUCE

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May 1, 2007 -- Trying to boost your child's vegetable consumption? You may want to reach for your food processor.

Kids don't necessarily notice when steamed broccoli and cauliflower are blended into their pasta sauce, a new study shows. As a result, the kids eat more vegetables without knowing it.

The study comes from Kathleen Leahy and Barbara Rolls, PhD, of Pennsylvania State University. Leahy is a nutrition sciences graduate student; Rolls is a professor of nutrition sciences.

Leahy designed the study, which included 61 children aged 3-5.

The researchers served the children lunch one day per week for four weeks. The lunches all included a pasta dish.

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Stealthy Sauce

The children didn't know it, but Leahy's team snuck broccoli and cauliflower into the pasta sauces in some of the lunches.

To make the sauce, the researchers steamed frozen broccoli and frozen cauliflower for seven minutes, following the directions on the frozen veggies' package. Next, they used a food processor to blend the steamed broccoli and cauliflower into the tomato sauce.

The finished sauce included "very tiny pieces" of broccoli and cauliflower, Leahy tells WebMD. "You couldn't tell that is was in there, visually. It was pretty imperceptible.

"We didn't tell them anything about it, and the preferences for the two pastas were pretty much the same," Leahy says. "They didn't really prefer one version of the pasta over the other, so both were equally accepted."

The researchers also made some of the pastas with low-fat dairy products. Again, the children didn't notice.

The bottom line: They consumed fewer calories and more vegetables when broccoli and cauliflower were blended into the pasta sauce.

Partial Solution

Leahy and Rolls don't recommend trying to conceal all veggies in children's diet.

"It is still important to keep children exposed to vegetables on a regular basis and have them eat them with their parents," Leahy says.

Rolls agrees. "I wouldn't advocate that this is the only way parents try to get kids to eat fruits and vegetables," she tells WebMD.

"They still need to sit down and eat fruits and vegetables, eat the real thing, because otherwise the kid's never going to even know what a piece of broccoli or cauliflower looks like. So this is one strategy to get their intake up, but it shouldn't certainly be the only strategy," says Rolls, who is also the author of *The Volumetrics Eating Plan: Techniques and Recipes for Feeling Full on Fewer Calories*.

"We want them to learn to like vegetables," Leahy says.

That may take time. Research has shown that children may not try a vegetable until they've seen it 10 to 15 times, Leahy notes.

"It's something you have to be persistent with," says Leahy, who presented the study today in Washington at Experimental Biology 2007, an annual meeting of several scientific societies.

SOURCES: Experimental Biology 2007, Washington, April 28-May 2, 2007. Kathleen Leahy, doctoral student in nutritional sciences, Pennsylvania State University. Barbara Rolls, PhD, professor of nutritional sciences, Pennsylvania State University; author, *The Volumetrics Eating Plan: Techniques and Recipes for Feeling Full on Fewer Calories*. News release, Pennsylvania State University.

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