

New studies reveal hidden insights to help inspire vegetable love

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Two new studies presented today at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior's (SNEB) annual conference may make it easier for moms to get their kids to eat – and enjoy – vegetables. Both studies were conducted by SNEB president Brian Wansink, PhD, the John Dyson Professor of Consumer Behavior at Cornell University, and funded by Birds Eye, the country's leading vegetable brand that recently launched a three-year campaign to inspire kids to eat more veggies.

With nine out of 10 American children and teens not meeting daily vegetable recommendations, Birds Eye has a sustained commitment to help reverse this decline. That includes funding research to help moms find new strategies to raise veggie-loving kids, and being the first company to engage kids to be part of the solution.

Birds Eye understands how [vegetables](#) make the meal and wants to help [moms](#) get even their pickiest eaters excited about vegetables. By working with Nickelodeon, the number-one entertainment brand for kids, and iCarly's Jennette McCurdy, Birds Eye is empowering kids' culinary creativity and encouraging them to share their veggie inspiration with other kids in a new initiative called "iCarly iCook with Birds Eye."

Vegetables Make the Meal

The first study of 500 mothers with young children found that vegetables helped enhance the perceived taste of the entrée and made the meal

appear to be more complete. The presence of vegetables on the plate also made the meal preparers appear to be more thoughtful and attentive.

"These findings underscore the concept that vegetables make the meal," Wansink said. "Vegetables do so much more than provide important nutrients, they're helping to make the entire meal more appealing and even making the person serving the meal appear to be more loving and caring."

The web-based study had participants rate the appeal of various meal combinations with and without vegetables, and rate the meal preparer in different scenarios. "We need all the help we can get to encourage more vegetables at dinner," Wansink said. Nearly 70 percent of vegetables eaten in America are eaten during dinner, yet only 23 percent of American dinners contain a full serving of vegetables.

"Simply talking about the nutrient contributions of vegetables may not be enough," he said. "This study shows that vegetables have other key benefits and we should be leveraging these attributes as well."

The second study reinforced the idea that parents may be giving up too early if they claim their kids don't like vegetables. Instead, Wansink said it's better to focus on the vegetables kids will eat, and not on the ones they won't.

Interviewing an ethnically diverse panel of 500 mothers with two children, Wansink and colleagues had participants identify the favorite vegetable of each child along with their own, and the menu of the five most frequently eaten meals in their homes. The results indicated that 83 percent of the children in the study had a favorite vegetable their mother could easily name, and 53 percent of the oldest children had the same favorite vegetable as their mother. There were six vegetables that composed 80 percent of the favorites:

- Corn (32.2%) – the favorite for boys
- Broccoli (29.4%) – the favorite for girls
- Carrots (23.2%)
- Green beans (17.2%)
- Potatoes (11.8%)
- Tomatoes (11.4%)

The five most popular dinner meals for children were pastas, tacos, hamburgers, meat balls and pork chops. Broccoli was the most preferred vegetable for children and mothers, except for the youngest male children.

"Children may not like all vegetables all of the time, but they may like some vegetables some of the time," Wansink said. "Keep serving the vegetables that kids prefer and don't be discouraged if they turn up their noses at other vegetables. They may eventually like them if you continue to offer them, and if they see you enjoy them, too. But celebrate these little victories and find ways to modify meals to accommodate your kids' favorite vegetables."

Birds Eye has created lots of fun vegetable recipes to get kids excited about vegetables, including those featuring kids' favorite vegetables – broccoli, corn and green beans – along with ways to add vegetables to favorite family meals. Visit BirdsEye.com to check out some of these ideas, and visit Nick.com/BirdsEye to learn more about the "iCarly iCook with Birds Eye" initiative that encourages [kids](#) to create their own wacky vegetable dish for a chance to have it featured on an episode of iCarly.

More information: Wansink B, Brumberg A, Shimizu M. Vegetables make the meal: New insights to motivate vegetable preparation for

family dinners. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2012; 44:S24.

Wansink B, Brumberg A, Shimizu M. Favorite children's vegetables by meal and age. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2012; 44:S78.

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