

New study reveals more inspiring reasons to serve veggies at dinner

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Parents may have some new motivations to serve their kids vegetables. A new study, funded by Pinnacle Foods' Birds Eye brand and published in *Public Health Nutrition*, found that adding vegetables to the plate led to more positive evaluations of both the main entrée and the cook. By simply serving vegetables with dinner, participants believed the main course would taste better and thought the server was more thoughtful and attentive.

"Most [parents](#) know that [vegetables](#) are healthy, yet vegetables are served at only 23% of American dinners," said lead author Brian Wansink, PhD, the John Dyson Professor of Marketing and [Consumer Behavior](#) at Cornell University. "That means we need to find some new motivations to encourage parents to make vegetables a bigger part of the meal. If parents knew that adding vegetables to the plate could make what they prepare for dinner seem more appealing, or could increase their own "heroic" appeal, then maybe they'd be more inspired to serve vegetables."

In the four-part study, Cornell researchers interviewed 500 mothers with at least two children under the age of 18 living at home. [Participants](#) first assessed the [personality](#) of women who either prepared or did not prepare vegetables with a family meal. They then rated four different meals that either included or did not include a vegetable in terms of the taste of the entrée and of the whole meal. [Respondents](#) were also asked to describe the meal preparer who had served vegetables or a preparer who had not served vegetables with a meal, and then identify their

favorite vegetables and the preferred preparation.

The results suggest that vegetables can play a powerful role in increasing the overall enjoyment of the meal. Across all four meals, the addition of vegetables helped increase the positive response in multiple ways – making the meal seem more "complete," "loving," "tasty," and prepared with more effort or thought. Questions regarding children's favorite vegetable revealed a wide variety of preferences but clearly indicated that almost all children had at least one vegetable they considered a favorite. Interestingly, the favored vegetable changed with the age of the child.

"These findings reinforce the concept that vegetables make the meal," Wansink said. "Simply talking about how vegetables are good for you may not be enough," he said. "Thinking about vegetables as an enhancement of the main course or the meal may be a more effective strategy." Wansink also recommends increasing the variety of vegetables offered to children and changing what vegetables are served as children get older, which will help to respond to their changing tastes as they mature.

"If a parent believes that adding a vegetable gives their family a better perception of the cook and what's cooked, it may encourage them to serve vegetables more often," Wansink said. "Considering that most kids are not eating adequate amounts of vegetables, we need to explore new approaches to increase consumption."

Going straight to kids for inspiration is another new approach for getting kids to eat and enjoy their vegetables. In fact, in partnership with Nickelodeon, Birds Eye uncovered more than sixteen thousand vegetable recipe concepts as part of the "iCarly iCook with Birds Eye" initiative. Birds Eye then took cues from these concepts to create a special collection of kid-friendly recipes starring Birds Eye Steamfresh®

products, which are perfect for kids because no knives or hot stoves are required. Kids can help their mom simply by pressing the buttons on the microwave. Visit www.birdseye.com/kids for more kid-friendly recipes, serving ideas, tips and tools.

More information: Wansink B, Shimizu M, Brumberg A. How vegetables make the meal: Their hedonic and heroic impact on perceptions of the meal and the preparer. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2012.

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