



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Got Leafy Greens?

Fresh vegetables are great sources of essential nutrients young children need for healthy growth and development. Vegetables, such as thin carrot sticks, small broccoli and cauliflower florets, and thin, tender celery sticks, are great choices and can be easily incorporated into any menu. However, many children do not eat enough vegetables each day. One easy way to include more vegetables is to increase the leafy greens on your child care menus. Check out these easy-to-follow tips for incorporating leafy greens in salads, stir-frys, soups, sandwiches, and other side dishes.

Serve salads filled with leafy greens. In terms of vegetables (and fruits), the darker the color, the more nutrient-rich the produce. Thus, prepare salads with Romaine and red lettuces, baby spinach, or even arugula. Then, add a variety of colorful chopped produce, such as strawberries or blueberries, to add extra color to the plate.

Add leafy greens into stir-frys. Almost any vegetable works great in a stir-fry, especially when combined with thin slices of lean beef, pork, chicken, or tofu. Chopped leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, and various Chinese cabbages, are the perfect addition to stir-fries. Since leafy vegetables cook quickly at high heat, add them just before serving.

Stir leafy greens into a hearty soup. Soups are another easy way to enjoy green leafy vegetables. Flavorful varieties, such as mustard greens, beet greens, and kale, are especially good in bean and lentil soups. Greens also cook quickly in hot liquids, so chop them into medium-sized pieces and add 10 minutes before serving. A few greens can jazz up canned soups as well, making a more appealing side dish or entrée.



Roll leafy greens into a sandwich wrap. Wraps are perfect for adding variety to menus, and they serve as great alternatives to sandwiches. When preparing wraps, start with a tortilla or pita bread. Choose some protein, such as tuna or chicken salad, sliced turkey, roast beef, or low-fat cheese. Then, add a layer of leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce, baby spinach, and arugula. This combination of protein and leafy greens can make for an appealing and tasty snack for young children.

Steam or sauté leafy greens. Fresh leafy greens can quickly be made into a delicious side for any meal. Steam and season with a little lemon juice; sauté with garlic or green onions; or microwave for 2 minutes and top with a little olive oil. For additional flavor, sprinkle lightly with cheese (feta, blue, or Gorgonzola) or chopped nuts (almonds, pecans, or walnuts).

In conclusion, as you plan your menus always remember the importance of young children eating a variety of vegetables. For more information on how you can incorporate more vegetables in your menus, check out the webpage: *Tips to Help You Eat More Vegetables* at ChooseMyplate.gov.

References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2010). 5 delicious ways to serve up leafy green vegetables. Retrieved from <http://www.theicn.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20101101085434.pdf>.

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