one of these days,
the vegetables
are bound to find her MOUTH
Make vegetables a part
of every lunch and dinner.
Eventually, kids start eating them.

mom, the magician

"I grew up in Japan. Meals featured vegetables and very little meat. My mother never gave much thought about getting me to eat vegetables. It was a given.

It's different here. My son has always been a picky eater. To get him to eat vegetables, I've had to become a magician. I make vegetables disappear so he doesn't know he is eating them.

Every week I concoct my 'magic vegetable formula' that eventually ends up in almost every food my children eat. I very finely chop onions, celery, carrots, zucchini, red pepper, and mushrooms and cook (or microwave) them just long enough so they loose their shape. Then I add my 'magic vegetable formula' to meat balls, meat loaf, spaghetti sauce, eggs—anything that my children eat. They never know it's there but gradually they are developing a taste for vegetables without even knowing it.

Sometimes I have to be extra sneaky. I buy frozen mashed butternut squash and stir some into macaroni and cheese, my son's favorite. He never suspects anything because they are both the same color.

I like to bake. When I do, I use applesauce instead of oil or shortening. Not only does it taste better, I feel better knowing it's better for my children.

Getting children to eat vegetables is all about changing their perceptions. One way to do that is to change the name of vegetables. At my house beans are called Yummie Beans. Broccoli is called mini trees. Changing their names has changed how much my children like them.

In the summer we visit farms where my son can pick his own vegetables. Like lots of children, he finds it hard to resist vegetables he picks right off the vine.

Our first pediatrician gave me good advice about vegetables that I've always remembered. He said to look at what kids eat by the week, not the meal. Don't get stressed out if they don't eat vegetables at each meal. Children go through phases and what they won't eat today may be their favorite tomorrow. I've followed his advice and give vegetables every day—seen or unseen. And I relax knowing I'm doing my part.

A few years ago vegetables never passed my son's lips. Now he has his favorites and he smiles when he sees them. Magic!"

Riko and her son

Riko's tips for sneaking in vegetables:

- Disguise vegetables and add them to your children's favorite foods.
- Rename vegetables, giving them fun names.
- Grow vegetables and let children pick them or visit farms where they are allowed to pick their own.
- Look at what your child eats by the week, not by the meal.

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