How to Eat Healthy Vegetables All Winter

When winter weather arrives, it can be tempting to put together a warm, hearty meal like noodles or pizza, and while delicious and filling they do not have many nutrients. But research has shown that frozen and canned vegetables have just as many nutrients as fresh vegetables and are a great alternative as fall comes to a close when the abundance of fresh vegetables tend to disappear.

For most of the year in Illinois the weather is too cold to grow many fruits and vegetables. Because of this, fresh produce may be more difficult to find in stores from November through May. They may also be more expensive since produce must be grown in a warmer part of the country and then shipped to Illinois.

Frozen and canned vegetables are inexpensive, store well, and keep for much longer than fresh vegetables. Just keep in mind that they have a different texture than fresh vegetables, so they taste best when added to hot dishes.

Below are some tips to help you and the children in your care eat more vegetables all winter.

- Buy frozen vegetables. The variety of frozen vegetables available can be amazing! They can keep for months in the freezer and work well when added to hot dishes like soup, stew, stir-fry, and pasta.
- Buy canned vegetables. Many children like to eat canned string beans, corn, peas, and sweet potatoes. Canned vegetables last for months on the shelf and can be used in place of fresh vegetables. Look for “low sodium” or “no sodium” cans. Sodium is another word for salt, so the packaging may also say “no salt added.” Once opened, store any leftovers in a separate container or plastic bag and use within 5 days.
- Buy fresh vegetables on sale. Take advantage of any produce that seems like it is a good value. Some vegetables are inexpensive all year long.

Dear Child Care Provider,
As the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, it can be tempting to make a box of macaroni and cheese for lunch or a pot of spaghetti for dinner. However, recent changes to the program emphasize the importance of eating vegetables every day. Even though fresh fruits and vegetables are slightly harder to find during the winter, this doesn’t mean you need to sacrifice healthy eating until summer. You can take advantage of canned and frozen vegetables to make healthy, affordable meals for the children in your care. This issue of Tasty Times will provide you with tips for eating vegetables all winter long, and give you healthy recipe ideas too.

—Nicolette Applebaum,
UIC Dietetic Intern

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Holiday Reporting
On the holidays listed below, we will assume that you are closed and not providing child care. If you are providing child care on any of these holidays you MUST indicate that you are open. If you use paper forms, use the Claim Information Form (CIF) to indicate that you will be open on a holiday. If you use KidKare to enter menus, under the Misc tab use the Manage Provider Calendar option to indicate that you care for children on a holiday.

HOLIDAYS:
• New Year’s Day
• Memorial Day
• Independence Day
• Labor Day
• Thanksgiving Day
• Christmas Day

Remember, October claims are due in our office by November 6th! Warning! Late claims WILL result in late payment!

How to Eat Healthy Vegetables All Winter Continued
Potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, and cucumbers are usually inexpensive all year because they are easily grown in many places.

• Buy in bulk. Larger cans or bags of vegetables cost a bit more up front, but are a better value and you will get more for your money. The company spends less money on packaging, which translates to savings for you.

• Buy fresh vegetables on sale or in bulk, and freeze them yourself. Wash and dry the vegetables completely before you freeze them. Most vegetables freeze well, except for vegetables that have a lot of water. Some vegetables that do not freeze well are cucumbers, lettuce, and celery. Vegetables that do freeze well include carrots, spinach, and corn.

Roasted Vegetable Pasta
This recipe, if made with whole grain pasta, will also meet the whole grain requirement for the day! Adjust it using any type of pasta or frozen vegetables you like.
Prep time: 10 minutes • Cook time: 20 minutes
Serves: 6 adults or 9-12 children

INGREDIENTS
• 2 cups (6 ounces) whole grain or regular noodles
• 1 pound chicken breast (chopped)
• 1 16-ounce bag frozen vegetables (broccoli, spinach, medley, etc.)
• Shredded parmesan cheese
• 2 tablespoons butter or oil
• Salt, pepper, garlic, and any other seasonings you like

DIRECTIONS
1. Boil a large pot of water with a dash of salt.
2. Cook the pasta according to the package directions. Drain and set aside.
3. Meanwhile, melt butter or oil in a pan and cook the chicken over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until chicken is no longer pink (5-8 minutes).
4. Add the vegetables to the pan with the chicken. Add salt, pepper, and other seasonings to taste as desired.
5. Continue cooking the chicken and vegetables, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are crispy-tender (6-9 minutes).
6. Add the pasta to the pan to reheat it.
7. To serve, sprinkle with shredded Parmesan cheese. Enjoy!

Reminder
The Illinois State Board of Education will be conducting unannounced child care home reviews during meal times this fall and winter. If you receive a visit, always check for identification and feel free to call us if you are doubtful of the person at your door. You or your assistant cannot ask the ISBE monitor to come back later; you or your assistant must conduct the review. The purpose of the ISBE review is to monitor Illinois Action for Children’s Healthy Food Program. ISBE is required to do this for all food programs by the United States Department of Agriculture. Be sure to call us if you are going to be closed or away during a meal time, and we will inform the ISBE monitor if he or she is at your door and you do not answer.