



Ontario Home Economics Association

## *Ask a Professional Home Economist*

**For Immediate Release**

# **Stealth Health**

by Barb Holland, P.H.Ec.

“Stealth health” – subtly integrating healthier components into favourite foods – is the latest concept in food marketing. What’s new about that?

Talk to any mother trying to feed finicky kids who stubbornly refuse to eat vegetables. Sure, kids might readily accept carrot cake, a sweet, high-fat concoction that contains grated carrot as a slightly redeeming feature, but a daily serving of carrot cake doesn’t cut it on the health scale.

However, adding shredded carrot to meatloaf takes on an added dimension *and* nutrition. Chances are kids won’t detect the finely chopped carrot, onion, green or red pepper or that you moisten the lean meat mixture with salsa. Chalk up 2 veggie servings – and you are on the road to meeting the new recommendation from Canada’s Food Guide that kids eat 4-6 servings of vegetables and fruit per day, teens get 7-8, adults 7-10, and those over 51 should strive for 7 daily servings.

Home Economist Mairlyn Smith, co-author (with Liz Pearson, R.D.) of *Ultimate Foods For Ultimate Health...and don’t forget the chocolate!* (Whitecap Books 2007) and mother of a 16-year old has lots of suggestions. “It may take 30 times to get a young child to like a certain veggie or food – they have highly sensitive taste buds. My advice is to introduce veggies when they’re young, persevere, and don’t give up.” Good eating habits must be established in childhood and last a lifetime.

### **Tips to “subtly integrate” more vegetables into your family’s diet**

- Rewrite classic kid favourites – who doesn’t like pizza and fries? Up the ante on your pizza by increasing the veggies to replace high-fat meat, pepperoni and sausage, sprinkle lightly with low-fat cheese. If ordering in, ask for a “vegetarian pizza with whole wheat crust and half the cheese”.
- Switch from fries to potato wedges (unpeeled) tossed in a bit of healthy olive or canola oil and baked until golden crisp. Try baking sweet potato chips or wedges, sticks of sweet parsnips, rutabaga or squash cubes. More delicious – more nutritious!
- Add grated carrot, diced onion and celery to chicken noodle soup – a classic vehicle for vegetable infusion. Want a thicker soup? Puree about one-third of the soup and return to the soup pot. If texture is an issue, i.e. the kids don’t want to see actual vegetables in their soup, whirl with an immersion blender until smooth. For a splash of colour, separately puree a

cooked vegetable such as roasted red pepper, squash or green peas (thinned with water or stock as necessary) until smooth. Swirl into soup.

- Try ‘camouflage cooking’ by adding pureed cooked carrots, onions or mushrooms to pasta sauce, or work the same ingredients into hamburger, meatball or meatloaf mixtures before shaping and cooking.
- Leave thin skins on potatoes and mash with cooked parsnip, celeriac (celery root) or rutabaga and a bit of extra virgin olive oil or canola oil.
- Up the vegetables in pasta dishes; toss cooked pasta with broccoli, cauliflower or peas. Add diced vegetables to rice dishes and extra veggies to stir-fries.
- Skip the meat, use low-fat cheese, slices of roasted red peppers or meaty portabella mushrooms to make a vegetarian lasagne. Mushroom Tip: use a small spoon to scrape out the dark gills on the underside of portabella mushrooms. This prevents a dark colour (liquid from the mushroom) staining the rest of the food (a dead giveaway you’ve upped the veggies).
- Increase the vegetables in stew or chili by adding onions, carrots, sweet potatoes, zucchini, parsnips or rutabaga chunks.
- Top baked potatoes with salsa rather than butter and sour cream. More stealth, less fat!
- Top baked tortilla chips with diced sweet peppers, mushrooms and tomatoes. Sprinkle with low-fat cheese, then microwave to melt cheese. Serve with salsa.
- Veggies and dip present as a colourful and social treat! Make the dip low-fat roasted red pepper hummus. Now that’s stealth! Try to include a new veggie on the platter of regulars. Introduce turnips sticks, crisp green or yellow beans or snow peas for variety.
- Add diced green onions, colourful diced peppers, mushrooms, cooked broccoli, frozen peas, corn or lima beans to scrambled eggs or a frittata mixture.

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**Barb Holland, P.H.Ec.** is a Toronto-based freelance Professional Home Economist and food writer.

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**For further information, please contact:**

Ontario Home Economics Association,  
14 Totten Place, Woodstock, ON N4S 8G7  
Tel/Fax: 519-290-1843  
E-mail: [nancyohea@rogers.com](mailto:nancyohea@rogers.com)  
Website: [www.ohea.on.ca](http://www.ohea.on.ca)