A recipe for getting your youngest customers to eat their greens
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

It’s no secret that British children are eating less and less veg. For most, ‘5 a day’ is now a far-fetched goal and as many as 1 in 7 4-11 year olds aren’t even getting a single portion of vegetables each day. And when you look at what they are actually eating, a fifth of their veg comes from pizza or baked beans.

Eating more veg is vital for children’s health. Not only is it essential for a healthy diet, reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers, learning to love veg as a child helps establish good eating habits for life.

WHAT COUNTS AS A KID’S PORTION?

40-60g raw veg or salad
40-60g cooked fresh, frozen or tinned veg
150ml veg juice

Pulses, beans and sweet potatoes count. Potatoes don’t, so think beyond the chip!

TIME FOR HOSPITALITY TO ACT

Parents know their kids should be eating more veg but often find it hard to stick to their guns when eating out.

We have a responsibility in the industry to support parents when they’re dining with us and to make the good choices the easy choices. No one wants a fight at the dinner table!

It’s easy to point the finger, but the truth is we all need to do more. There’s greater public demand than ever for the sector to lead the way in providing healthy, good food but we need to make sure the little ones’ meals aren’t forgotten.

Restaurants lead trends and, with families eating out on average 1.5 times a week, this is a big opportunity. Any lunch or dinner where a child doesn’t eat veg sets them up to not meet their 5 a day. But get it right and we’ll have a real positive impact.

‘EAT’ NOT ‘WASTE’

The big challenge here is serving something that kids actually want to eat.

We can’t just add some veg and hope for the best. Plonked on the plate as an afterthought it’s likely to end up in the bin.

This toolkit exists to make sure that doesn’t happen!
WHO ARE THE SUSTAINABLE RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION?

We believe the problems facing our food system are complex and urgent. We believe that restaurants can be a positive force for change, and that a good business does much more than just serve food.

By providing consultancy, training and industry leading benchmarking to the food service sector, we help make that happen. We work with businesses to drive the sector further, faster towards a progressive future.

“Just think. If we could teach this generation of children how to eat, we’d solve the obesity crisis for good – because they’d teach their kids and so on. Chefs can really help, by wooing them with delicious veg.”

PRUE LEITH, Vice-President of the SRA

WHAT IS FOOD MADE GOOD?

Food Made Good is how we collaborate with chefs, restaurateurs, marketers, foodies and social changers to, you guessed it, make food good.

Each month we focus on a single mission, making it easy for businesses to come together and work towards a shared goal. We call on the industry to join in the conversation, and stand up and be counted.

The Food Made Good community exists on and offline to connect people working together to make food good for people and the planet.

“Restaurants have an important role to play in supporting children and families to eat well. By providing healthy and high quality meal options packed full of veg – restaurants can help to create an environment where it is normal, easy, and enjoyable for children and young people to eat well.”

ROB PERCIVAL from the Soil Association’s Out to Lunch campaign

WHAT’S IN THIS GUIDE

• Help and inspiration for restaurants
• Key principles for rethinking your children’s menu offer
• Examples of tactics and best practice from around the industry
• Input from across the sector, reflecting the challenges faced by the full range of business types
• Specific advice for QSRs that may find our aim too much of a stretch (page 10)
• “But what if...?” – overcoming some core challenges (page 11)

“Millions of years of evolution have given our children an irresistible yearning for sweet, energy rich foods and we need all the tools at our disposal to fight back. The SRA’s toolkit is packed with ideas about how you can get children eating more veg- most importantly by making them taste good.”

HENRY DIMBLEBY, co-founder of LEON and co-author of the School Food Plan
Principle 1: MAKE IT AUTOMATIC

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

• A standard offer where veg is an add-on inevitably leads to meal time bust ups
• Given the choice, many kids will automatically go for the tempting option (garlic bread vs peas, anyone?)
• And what parent wants to pay a few extra quid for something that they aren’t even sure their child will eat
• Just don’t set it up as a choice and there’s nothing to argue about!

TACTICS TO TRY

1. Kids love to feel in control so allowing them to choose is still important – just make sure all the options include veg
2. Don’t make a song and dance out of it – all options have veg in because, well why wouldn’t they?
3. Take advantage of the fact that kids arrive hungry by serving some raw veg or salad first, while they wait
4. Try to think about simple swaps you can make, like sweet potatoes rather than potatoes
5. Are there ways to get veg in under the radar? For example, extra veg in pasta or pizza sauces, leeks or cauliflower in mac and cheese...

Principle 2: MAKE IT APPETISING

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

• Sad looking veg will get left and then wasted, so steer clear of plating up portions of veg thoughtlessly
• Cooking, serving or presenting vegetables differently, with a twist or bit of imagination, will make them more likely to get eaten
• Kids are so often served the same thing so it’s an opportunity to mix it up!

TACTICS TO TRY

1. Create visual interest on menus; make veg dishes attractive with photography or fun designs
2. Celebrate the variety of colour found in different types of vegetables
3. Encourage interactivity, for example allowing kids to be involved in preparation or add finishing touches to dishes
4. Get your chefs involved in innovating, embracing new ideas and mixing things up!

Ask & Zizzi serve a veg starter with every dish: carrot and cucumber sticks with dips

Wahaca serve kids meals with carrot & cucumber dippers, tomato salsa and freshly squished guacamole – each of which counts as a portion of veg
Principle 3: MAKE IT FUN

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT
• We know that engaging children with activities while they eat is an easy win
• So getting them talking about and interacting with veg can be a great way to get them more interested in eating it
• Many kids don’t know the basics about where veg comes from and how it’s grown
• Eating out should be fun and if kids enjoy their time in your restaurant, then the whole family is more likely to come back

TACTICS TO TRY
1. Tailor your activity packs and other kids materials to be about the food – it’s an opportunity to get them more engaged with your menu
2. Challenges and rewards encourage eating – try giving away ‘I ate my veg’ stickers, challenge them to ‘eat the rainbow’, or even suggest crunchy contents with raw veg!
3. Use seasonality as a way of introducing different veg or tell suppliers’ stories
4. Get your marketing department excited about it

Principle 4: MAKE IT EASY FOR PARENTS

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT
• Every parent wants their child to be healthy, but they also bear the scars of trying to get the kids to eat their greens
• They want you to make their life easier when they are eating out
• It’s often easier for parents to avoid stress by just letting the kids do what they want but there are ways we can empower them so there’s no need to argue in the first place

TACTICS TO TRY
1. Eliminate the fight: support parents in giving their kids a healthy meal
2. Talk about why you think veg is important on adult menus or literature and encourage parents to lead by example by eating it themselves
3. Think about using the children’s menu to make them feel important: special menus just for kids; serving small portions of ‘grown up food’; or a specific offer for older children
**QSRS:**

**START WITH ONE MORE PORTION**

We understand the challenges faced when serving a limited menu that changes infrequently and how offering the customer choice is really important in this context. But often that means veg takes a back seat and is easy for kids to avoid. Nevertheless it is possible to find ways of ensuring that it’s included, while still offering choice.

Some example tactics:

- If you are a burger restaurant where the standard order is burger and chips think about the veg content of the dips, or half the chips could be root veg/sweet potato
- If your menu format is main and two sides, how about making it a choice of one each from main/carb/veg
- If you are a pizza place where people only order pizzas, could you add veg into the sauce
- If you can’t change the menu easily, is there a way of making veg a default like serving veg & dips or salad as an appetiser

Menus may be hard to change, so experiment with engagement tactics and using your marketing channels: activity packs, stickers, leaflets/table talkers, point of sale, till screens. These could all be used to engage kids and empower parents.

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**BUT WHAT IF...**

...our customers don’t care? Of our parents aren’t asking for it, why do it?

- Families are spending more on vegetables to eat at home. But the mushrooming restaurant sector is missing a huge opportunity by failing to provide parents with healthy, vegetable-rich options for their children
- Providing and promoting delicious, healthy kids’ options will help you stand out and attract new customers

...it adds cost? We need the margin to stay the same on our kids menu

- Think about swaps rather than additions, or focus on getting kids to eat the veg you already offer through better communications or engagement tactics

...we don’t have the space or supply? We can’t introduce a new product we don’t already stock

- Involve your chefs in developing new ways to adapt the veg you already use in adult menus

...it creates more waste? We don’t want to be throwing away produce

- Don’t just plonk veg on the plate without thought – the tactics in this guide aren’t just about serving veg but getting it eaten

...we have the options but kids don’t choose them?

- Find ways of making every meal choice one that involves veg
- This isn’t about forcing kids to choose ‘the healthy option’, simply taking away the opportunity to not get veg

For more on feeding children visit [www.foodmadegood.org/kidsveg](http://www.foodmadegood.org/kidsveg) where you can share, comment and be inspired by others.
OUR AIM:

For every child to eat 2 portions of veg, with every meal, in every restaurant.

The Sustainable Restaurant Association

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#KidsVegOut
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