

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Kids not eating fruit? Try cutting, slicing it

How can I get my grandchildren to eat more fruits and vegetables when they're visiting? I am lucky that I get to have them over often, but I can't seem to entice them to eat much produce.

You're not alone. Most children (and teens and adults for that matter) don't eat enough fruits and vegetables, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

But for kids, you might try thinking small. That is, if you don't already, try slicing fruits and vegetables into bite-size pieces. You might be surprised at the results.

Research by the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University indicates that slicing fruit could increase consumption, at least in school cafeterias. You might find similar success at home.

For the study, published in 2013 in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, researchers first interviewed 23 elementary and middle school students and found two primary reasons why they avoided fresh fruit. Surprisingly, younger students said they found whole fruit to be too large and cumbersome to eat comfortably. Students with braces or missing teeth said the same thing. The second reason? The older students, particularly girls, said they felt the whole fruit was messy and unattractive to eat in front of others.

The researchers decided to test how slicing fruit, specifically apples, would affect consumption. They provided eight elementary schools with a commercial apple slicer. When students requested an apple, a cafeteria worker would slice it before giving it to the student. By doing so, the sales of whole fruit increased in the schools by an average of 61 percent.

The researchers then followed up their study in



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middle schools. Of six middle schools in a district, three were provided the commercial apple slicer, and three weren't. In all, the slicers increased average daily apple sales by 71 percent. The researchers also examined cafeteria waste to determine how much of the apples served were eaten. They found that in schools with the fruit slicers, the percentage of students who ate more than half their apple increased by 73 percent.

This all points to how important it can be to pay as much attention to how food is served as to which food is served when it comes to encouraging kids to eat fruits and vegetables. Other research has shown that promoting cafeteria salad bars with superhero-type characters can increase consumption of vegetables. And, of course, children tend to pick up habits from watching important adults in their lives, so be sure to model the behavior you want to see them imitate.

Another thing to consider, depending on how old your grandchildren are, is to make sure there are no choking hazards. The USDA suggests cutting foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes in half before serving them to preschoolers.

For more information about overcoming barriers to eating healthy, take a look at the Cornell lab's website at foodpsychology.cornell.edu. For tips from the USDA according to age group, see choosemyplate.gov/audience.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Carol Smathers, field specialist for Ohio State University Extension in Youth Nutrition and Wellness.

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