



# NUTRITION TIPS

## Vegetables

A vegetable is basically any part of a plant that can be eaten. This includes buds, flower buds, leaves and shoots. Vegetables comprise one of the healthiest food groups around, and are important in promoting growth and healthy living in children.

Vegetables are classified into three main groups based on their nutrient content. The dark green leafy vegetables include *ugwu* (pumpkin leaf), waterleaf, *ewedu*, lettuce and spinach. In the orange vegetable group are pumpkin, carrots and sweet potatoes. The starchy vegetables are corn, green peas and potatoes. Other vegetables include cabbage, green or red peppers, mushrooms, okra, onions and tomatoes.

Vegetables are very rich in essential nutrients like potassium, folic acid, vitamins A, C and E, and dietary fibre. Vitamin A helps keep children's eyes and skin healthy and also protects them from infections; vitamin E is important in maintaining smooth skin texture, while vitamin C helps cuts and wounds to heal and also keeps teeth and gums healthy. The

dietary fibre is important for proper bowel function and reduces the chances of constipation in children.

It is important to wash vegetables under clean water and rub briskly since they usually come with dirt and surface micro-organisms. You must however drain the water after washing, before cooking or eating.

## Spinach

Spinach is a mild flavoured deep green vegetable with succulent leaves that can be wrinkled or flat. It is one of the cheapest vegetables in Nigeria, and in the Western part of the country it is used to prepare stews, soups and salads.

Apart from being high in fibre, spinach is rich in vitamins A, C and K. It also contains some B-vitamins and minerals like zinc, magnesium, calcium, potassium and manganese. Spinach provides a lot of iron and chlorophyll, which children's bodies can readily use to make blood.

When buying spinach, make sure it is still slightly crisp and green. Avoid the yellow, wet

and rotting leaves. To store, you should sort out the rotting leaves before putting the unwashed ones in a plastic bag for storage in a refrigerator. But, depending on how fresh it is on purchase, you should use it within two to four days.

## Waterleaf

Waterleaf is commonly found in the southern part of Nigeria and it is one of the most widely used green leafy vegetables in the country. It is nutrient-filled and contains minerals like calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, and vitamins A, E, K, B1 and B2. It also contains vitamin C, which is an important antioxidant that protects children's bodies from dangerous chemicals called "free radicals". Waterleaf also contains nutritious juices that help to purify and refresh the body's metabolic processes, while also replenishing the fluid in the system.

Waterleaf is tender and cooks very quickly. To prepare it for eating, wash thoroughly without cutting, then cut slightly and cook. This way, the nutrients are preserved when you use it to cook your stew, soup or salad.

### \* For more information on child nutrition

Visit the Olu Akinkugbe Foundation  
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