

## Dietician warns against covert vegies



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Apparently, all's fair in love, war and getting your kids to eat their vegies.

At least that's the premise behind Jessica Seinfeld's new family cookbook, *Deceptively Delicious*, which promises to seduce young vegie haters by hiding spinach in their cupcakes.

It's a controversial strategy, but appearances by its celebrity author - who is married to comedian Jerry Seinfeld - on *Oprah* and the morning shows, and feisty showdowns in the blogosphere have propelled the book to the top of the best-seller lists.

According to Seinfeld, the book has spurred a sea change in how parents feed their children. Her blog recounts her delight at the flood of emails from people "who bought the book and instantly changed their families' eating habits at home.

Do you know how gratifying it is to be thanked by a mother for the fact that her child just ate spinach for the first time? And loved it?"

But if that mother was following Seinfeld's recipes, then that spinach was likely buried in chocolate cake batter or blueberry cheesecake cupcakes - not tossed with a nice vinaigrette, sauteed with garlic or served up in any conventional manner.

And that's what concerns UC Berkeley's Patricia Crawford, a child obesity expert and principal investigator on a National Health Institutes study growth and health.

"I've been just fretting about this," Crawford says.

"Let's just hide (the vegetables) and see if they like it when they're 6 or 8 or 10? I don't think so."

The book's advice runs counter, says Crawford, to everything nutritionists believe about building healthy eating habits. Early childhood is when kids are most receptive to new flavours.

It's unrealistic to expect them to suddenly acquire a taste for actual vegetables when everything's been hidden during their formative years.

"That's the time to integrate them into the family meal," Crawford says. "Don't serve them baby food. Blend up what it is you make. If you love grilled zucchini, blend up your zucchini and make sure your baby likes what you like."

Spinach-infused cupcakes or casseroles enriched with a surreptitious half-cup of mashed chickpeas don't pack much of a nutritional wallop anyway, says Crawford.

By the time a casserole has been divided into eight servings - not that a young child eats an eighth of a casserole anyway, Crawford points out - you're talking a tablespoon of added nutrients.

Run the recipes through a nutritional value calculator and the results are less than impressive.

The additional nutrients in one Seinfeld recipe added the equivalent of 0.1 grams of protein, 1 per cent of the daily recommended dosage of vitamin A and 2 per cent of vitamin C per serving.

And her hot chocolate recipe, which replaces some of the skim milk with sweet potato puree, sacrifices calcium for Vitamin C.

Seinfeld argues that she offers her children conventional vegetable dishes too, but that these methods sneak in a little extra. Crawford doesn't buy it.

But philosophy is one thing. Getting broccoli down Junior's gullet is quite another. And for some families, the nutritional ends justify the means.

"Yes, I have lied," says mum Karen Kopiko-Upshaw. "When it comes to food that I really want them to try, I will try anything."

Kopiko-Upshaw tells her children that Dora the Explorer loves string beans.

Catherine Schaefer renames foods that her kids would normally refuse - veggie lasagna is rechristened "pizza lasagna."

Peg Healy, meanwhile, simply chops vegetables and adds them to curries, casseroles and stir-fries, whether the recipe calls for them or not.

But outright deception?

"It's almost impossible to sneak anything past my kids," says Allen Mueller.

"The littlest speck of seasoning or anything which is not within the cheese or carb genre alerts their suspicions.

"I cannot remember anything that we have tried to serve them that has made it under their radar screens."

Ban before-dinner snacking, says Crawford, "then you just happen to put those things with vegetables on the table first. Don't put it on after the macaroni."

Don't force a child to taste a food, or encourage him too much, but offer vegetables with every meal, says Crawford.

Model the behaviour of a veggie-lover - let the kids see you love those colourful foods.

And a little psychology goes a long way. Tempt them, but not with spinach cupcakes.

## **MCT**

*This story was found at:* <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/11/29/1196037062746.html>