

Lack of vegetable choices in infant and toddler food is widespread

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Eat your vegetables is a well-worn message that weary parents have been giving reluctant children at the dinner table for generations.

It turns out that convincing children to eat those green vegetables is difficult partly because their tastes aren't always nurtured in infancy to accept the bitterness of dark green vegetables.

And that inability to foster a taste for those vegetables isn't simply because the infant makes a face at the first taste of those greens. It's more often related to a lack of commercially prepared single-[vegetable](#) products available to parents and caregivers to offer their [infants](#) and toddlers, according to a new study led by researchers from the University of Colorado School of Medicine on the Anschutz Medical Campus.

"The commercial infant and toddler foods market in the U.S. does not appear to provide caregivers with an adequate type and selection of products to facilitate children's later acceptance of the kinds of vegetables they will encounter and be encouraged

to consume once they have transitioned to table foods," writes Kameron J. Moding, PhD, postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Pediatrics, and her co-authors.

The article appears online in the current issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. It is the first study to examine the prevalence and types of vegetables in infant and toddler [food](#) manufactured and sold in the United States. The researchers compiled a database of 548 infant and toddler foods sold by more than 20 U.S. companies.

After building the database, they examined the ingredients and nutrients using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's vegetable categories. Of those 548 foods in the database, only 52 were single-vegetable products and none of those were dark green vegetables or beans/peas.

Further, when the baby food had multiple ingredients, fruits were listed as the first ingredient in 37.8 percent of the products, more commonly than all vegetables. Red/orange vegetables, such as carrots and sweet potatoes, were the first ingredient in 23.7 percent of products, while dark green vegetables were listed first in only 1.1 percent of products.

The researchers note that infants are predisposed to accept sweetness while they must learn, through repeated experiences, to accept the bitterness commonly found in dark green vegetables. In the U.S., though, commercial food providers "may not provide caregivers with the variety and specificity of products they need to adequately expose their infants and toddlers to vegetable flavors."

Moding and her colleagues recommend developing and expanding the commercial availability of infant and [toddler](#) vegetable products to improve the rates of vegetable consumption among children. Previous national studies have found that about 30 percent of infants and toddlers do not consume any

vegetable on a given day. The lack of commercially prepared products to help children learn to like these flavors may contribute to children's low intakes during infancy and later in childhood.

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