

Jolly Tomato blog

Re-Thinking Ketchup



Ketchup, once dubiously considered a vegetable, and possibly the closest some kids get to eating one 'is cleaning up its act. First Heinz started tinkering with its recipe to create a version that has about 15 percent less sodium. Now Hunt's is removing high fructose corn syrup from its recipe. So does that make ketchup a health food now?

Uh, not exactly. If your kids are like ours, who could take it or leave it, there's probably no harm in the occasional ketchup garnish, especially as a treat at a restaurant or a birthday party. And if ketchup is improving its nutritional profile, even on the margins, that's a good thing.

But if your little eaters are the kind who like to drown their food in the gooey red stuff day after day, a little tweak in the recipe here and there won't make much of a difference. Even if they're getting less salt with the new version, they're still getting a big wallop of sugar with every cup they consume.

So when you find yourself going through institutional-sized bottles on a regular basis, or when it has become a food group unto itself in your child's diet, it might be time to re-think your ketchup strategy. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Idea #1: Make your own ketchup. Really. Don't roll your eyes. Sure, it'll take a little investment of time (about the same amount of time as it would if you were making tomato sauce) but you can use home-grown tomatoes if you have them, and you can adjust sugar and seasonings to your own taste. (Extra bonus tip: We've seen some homemade ketchup recipes that let you sneak other vegetables like carrots inside.)

Idea #2: Try alternatives such as Krazy Ketchup (sweetened with agave) or other organic ketchups.

Idea #3: Let them eat salsa. This will help you dial down on the sugar content, and if you're willing to make your own, you can create any number of variations on the theme depending on their taste and yours (pineapple salsa, anyone?).

Idea #4: Try a variation on the theme. It doesn't have to be tomato-ey as long as it's red, right? Make a nice red pepper coulis that your kids can use for dipping breads, vegetables, or even fries.

Idea #5: Go radical. Who cares if it's red? Let them try dipping little bites of food in yogurt, mustard, olive oil, hummus, or low-fat salad dressings instead.

Of course there are times when nothing but good old-fashioned ketchup will do. And no matter how many times the commercial recipes are tweaked, ketchup is still likely to be a staple of the pre-teen and teen diet. Just don't tell yourself that because it has lycopene, it's a health food. And keep your mind open to the many tasty alternatives.