

The 'IKEA Effect' — And Getting Kids To Eat Their Veggies

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A couple of years ago, at the peak of my children's reluctance to eat vegetables, I decided to try an experiment.

When the kids arrived home from daycare one afternoon, I had bowls of colorful vegetables cut up and ready to go: crunchy red and yellow peppers, bushy little florets of broccoli, tomatoes and mushrooms and olives. I gave them each a cheese pizza base to “decorate” for dinner, and they gleefully complied. My older daughter made a face with olive eyes, broccoli hair, and a bright, red-pepper mouth. My younger daughter loaded on veggies by the fistful.

It felt like a parenting win! And I smugly patted myself on the back as the pizzas cooked in the oven, as we inhaled that toasty pizza smell, and as we sat down to eat. And I kept patting myself on the back right until the moment the freshly-baked pizzas made it back to their creators, who both — without hesitation — removed every speck of vegetable matter before happily consuming the “just cheese pizza” left behind.

As an effort to increase vegetable consumption, my experiment was not a success. And yet, I'd been motivated by a compelling idea — the idea that we value something more highly when we make it ourselves.