

# Cooking Together With Children

## Engaging Children in Cooking is a Good Way to Help Them Build Healthy Eating Habits

### Learning Opportunities

- Most children enjoy helping in the kitchen. While they help you cook, you can talk to them about healthy foods and portion sizes.
- Children like to eat food they make. This is a good way to get them to try new healthy foods.
- Cooking gives children a chance to measure, count, and see food change. This is early math and science learning. Your child can learn new words and symbols by cooking with you. Talk about the food and what you are doing. Read words on food containers together.
- Cleanup teaches responsibility. It is part of many creative, messy things we do.
- Cooking builds self-esteem. Most children feel proud and important when they help prepare food.
- Kitchen time offers a special role-modeling opportunity. Cooking together creates closer bonds and lifelong memories.



### How Can Children Help You?

2-Year-Olds Can:	3-Year-Olds Can:	4-Year-Olds Can:	5- to 6-Year-Olds Can:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wipe tabletops</li> <li>• Wash fruits and vegetables</li> <li>• Break cauliflower or broccoli into pieces</li> <li>• Tear lettuce or greens</li> <li>• Carry ingredients from one place to another</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrap potatoes in foil for baking</li> <li>• Knead and shape dough</li> <li>• Apply soft spreads</li> <li>• Mix or pour ingredients</li> <li>• Shake liquids in a covered container to mix them</li> <li>• Put things in the trash</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peel oranges or hard-boiled eggs</li> <li>• Mash bananas or cooked beans with a fork</li> <li>• Cut herbs like parsley, cilantro, or chives with kid-safe scissors</li> <li>• Set the table</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure ingredients</li> <li>• Use an egg beater</li> </ul> 



## Creative Opportunities

Set out three or four healthy foods, and let children make a new snack or sandwich from them. Use foods your children can eat without choking.

### Start with:

- Healthy bread, like whole grain or rye
- Whole grain crackers or graham crackers
- Mini rice cakes or popcorn cakes
- Small bagels
- Small pieces of pita bread

### Spreads could include:

- Fat-free or low-fat cream cheese or cheese spread
- Fat-free or low-fat peanut butter
- Bean dip
- Jelly with no sugar added

### Toppings could include:

- Slices of apple or banana
- Raisins or other dried fruit
- Strawberries
- Slices of cucumber or squash
- Cherry tomatoes cut in small pieces

As you help your children make a new snack or sandwich talk about why it is healthy. Point out each food group in the snack or sandwich. Explain that eating a mix of foods is good for you. Ask why the snack or sandwich tastes good. Is it sweet, juicy, chewy, or crunchy?

## Kitchen Rules

- Wash hands before and after cooking.
- Wash the work area before starting.
- Pull back hair if it is long.
- Taste with a clean spoon. Put licked spoons in the sink to be washed.
- Keep raw and cooked food separate.
- Stay away from hot surfaces and utensils, and sharp objects. An adult needs to help.
- Walk slowly. Carry food and utensils with care.

Adapted from U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Nibbles for Health Newsletter 31," 2008.

## Spills and Mistakes? No Problem.

Be patient with spills and mistakes. Young children do not have the same muscle coordination and skills that you do. Even if meals take longer to prepare, it is worth letting children help. Remember that the goal is to help children learn about healthy eating.



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COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER  
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