

Cooking With Children

Get Them Interested

Cooking with your children is a good way to help them develop healthy eating habits. Most children enjoy helping in the kitchen. While they help you prepare a meal, you can talk to them about healthy foods. Children like to eat the food they make. This is also a good way to get them to try new healthy foods.

LET THEM HELP

You can show your children how to help you prepare meals. Here are ways that children of different ages can help in the kitchen:

2-year-olds can:

- Wipe tabletops.
- Scrub and rinse fruits and vegetables.
- Tear lettuce or greens.
- Break cauliflower.
- Bring ingredients from one place to another.

3-year-olds can:

- Wrap potatoes in foil for baking.
- Knead and shape dough.
- Mix ingredients.
- Pour liquids.
- Shake liquids in a covered container.
- Apply soft spreads.
- Put things in the trash.

4-year-olds can:

- Peel oranges or hard-boiled eggs.
- Mash bananas or cooked beans with a fork.
- Cut parsley and green onions with kid-safe scissors.
- Set the table.

5- to 6-year-olds can:

- Measure ingredients.
- Use an egg beater.

▶ **Be sure to have children wash their hands before and after helping in the kitchen.**

Be patient with spills and mistakes. Remember that the goal is to help your children learn about healthy eating.

LET THEM BE CREATIVE

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

Start with:

- A new kind of bread (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:

- Low-fat cream cheese or cheese spread
- Low-fat peanut butter
- Bean dip
- Jelly or jam 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
- Slices of cheese or hard-boiled egg

▶ **As you help your children make the new snack or sandwich talk about why it is healthy.**

Point out the different food groups that are included in the snack or sandwich. Explain that eating a variety of foods is healthy.

Ask why the snack or sandwich tastes good. Is it sweet, juicy, chewy, or crunchy?

Adapted from U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children 4 to 6 Years Old," 1999.

*Information provided by *We Can! We Can!* is a collaboration between the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the National Cancer Institute.