



# 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.