

# Kids in the Kitchen



Step into the kitchen and prepare your youngster for a lifetime of good eating habits by helping her learn to enjoy cooking. She'll find that homemade foods are fun to prepare, can taste better than packaged foods, and are healthier. Use these tips and recipes to get started.

## Be creative

Let your child use his imagination in the kitchen. Point out healthy foods in your pantry or refrigerator (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, low-fat dairy products). Then, encourage him to make something he likes using different combinations. For instance, he might create a sandwich with whole-wheat bread, apple slices, and



gouda cheese. Or he could toss a salad of spinach leaves, tomatoes, leftover chicken, and low-fat french dressing.

## Find recipes

Look through recipes together, and let your youngster choose one to try (see *In the Kitchen with Kids* by Barbara Hughston or <http://kids.health.org/kid/recipes>).

Discuss things to consider when deciding what to make. *Examples:* What

ingredients do we already have? What would we need at the store? How much time will the recipe take?

## Pitch in

To help your child get comfortable in the kitchen, look for jobs she can do alone or with just a little help. Use these examples as a guide:

● **Children who are 3–4 can...** tear lettuce for salads, mash soft foods with a fork or potato masher, pour liquids, stir batters, use cookie cutters, and sprinkle cheese on pizza.

● **Children who are 5–8 can...** do any of the above, plus... cut soft foods with a dinner knife, scrub vegetables and fruits, sift, crack eggs, knead dough, use a rolling pin, gather and measure ingredients, spray or grease baking dishes, spread peanut butter on a sandwich, and use the microwave with adult supervision.

● **Children who are 9–12 can...** do any of the above jobs, plus... peel carrots, open cans, peel hard-boiled eggs, and use small appliances like a blender or mixer with adult supervision. If you think she's ready, you can teach her to cut or chop vegetables with a knife.

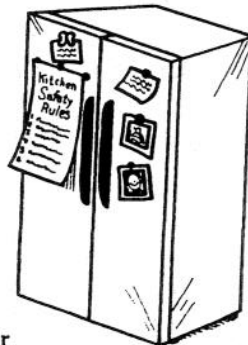
*Tip:* Give your youngster different jobs when you cook together. That way, she'll learn new skills and become more confident in the kitchen.

## Safety first

Prevent accidents in the kitchen and be sure your young cook is safe by teaching her basic kitchen safety rules like these:

- To keep floors from becoming slippery, clean up any spills when they happen.
- Turn pan handles in so they face away from the edge of the stove or countertop.
- Never leave cooking food unattended, even in the microwave.
- Use sharp knives only with adult supervision.
- Never turn on the stove or oven without asking an adult first.
- To stay healthy, always wash hands before preparing food or eating.

*Tip:* Post safety rules on your refrigerator as a reminder.



*continued*

## My recipe file

Encourage your child to collect recipes he likes. He can write each one on a recipe card and store it in a small box. Or he might start his own cookbook by typing the recipes on a computer. Here are some kid-friendly recipes—with just a little help, he can make them himself.

### Fruity Yogurt

*You'll need:* 1 tangerine, 1 can pineapple chunks (packed in their own juice), low-fat vanilla yogurt

Peel the tangerine, divide it into sections, and throw away the seeds. Put the tangerine pieces in a bowl, and stir in the pineapple chunks. Spoon yogurt on top.



### Sandwich on a Stick

*You'll need:* deli meat, cubes of cheese (cheddar or swiss), grape tomatoes, mustard, toothpick

Fold your favorite sandwich meat into quarters. Thread the meat and cheese and a grape tomato onto a toothpick. Dip in mustard.

### Pizza Flower

*You'll need:* a whole-grain English muffin, marinara sauce, provolone slices, olives, green pepper, mushrooms

Have a parent slice the green pepper and mushrooms. Then, use a fork to split the English muffin in half. Spoon marinara sauce on each half, and top with a slice of cheese. Decorate it like a flower by putting an olive in the center, green pepper slices for the stem, and mushrooms for the petals. Ask an adult to broil the muffin for you.

### Banana Man

*You'll need:* 1 banana, peanut butter, dried fruit (raisins, cherries, mango), pretzel sticks

Peel the banana. Use peanut butter to “glue” dried fruit on the banana for the eyes, nose, and mouth. Put the pretzel sticks in the sides for arms.



### Pocket Tacos

*You'll need:* 2 whole-grain pitas, ½ cup salsa, lettuce, shredded cheddar cheese, low-sodium taco sauce

Cut the pitas in half, and put the salsa inside. Tear lettuce into bite-sized pieces, and divide among the pitas. Add the cheese and taco sauce. *Idea:* To make a meat taco, ask a grown-up to brown some ground beef or turkey for you.

### Orange Slushies

*You'll need:* 2 cups fat-free milk, 1 cup water, 1 cup ice cubes, 1 tbsp. sugar, 1 6-oz. can frozen orange juice concentrate

Put all the ingredients in a blender and, with an adult's help, blend until slushy.

### Cucumber Crunch

*You'll need:* 1 medium cucumber, 1 large carrot, 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar, 1 tbsp. olive oil, ½ tsp. honey

Ask a grown-up to dice the cucumber and slice the peeled carrot into thin circles. Make a dressing by stirring together the apple cider vinegar, olive oil, and honey. Mix the vegetables with the dressing.

### Cheesy Peas and Carrots

*You'll need:* 2 tbsp. fat-free milk, ½ cup cottage cheese, ½ cup low-fat cream cheese, 2 tbsp. shredded mild cheddar cheese, 1 cup cooked peas, 1 cup cooked carrots, Parmesan cheese

In a blender, mix the milk, cottage cheese, cream cheese, and cheddar cheese until smooth. Pour into a bowl, and stir in the peas and carrots. Sprinkle a little Parmesan cheese on top.

*Editor's Note:* Nutrition Nuggets is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.