

parent tips

Getting Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking with your kids is a good way to help them build healthy eating habits.



Get them interested

Most kids enjoy helping in the kitchen. While they help you cook, you can talk to them about healthy foods. Children like to eat food they make. This is a good way to get them to try new healthy foods.

Let them help

You can show your kids how to help you prepare meals. Here are ways that young kids can help in the kitchen:

2-year-olds can:

- Wipe tabletops
- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Tear lettuce or greens
- Break cauliflower or broccoli into pieces
- Carry ingredients from one place to another

3-year-olds can:

- Knead and shape dough
- Mix or pour ingredients
- Shake liquids in a covered container to mix them
- 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 kids wash their hands before and after helping in the kitchen. Be patient with spills and mistakes. Remember that the goal is to help your kids learn about healthy eating.

Let them be creative

Set out three or four healthy foods, and let your kids 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 whole-wheat 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 kids make the 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?

We Can! is a program from the National Institutes of Health that offers resources for parents, caregivers and communities to help children 8-13 years old stay at a healthy weight through eating right, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time.

To learn more, go to <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call 1-866-35-WECAN.

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