



Engaging kids in planning and preparing meals can encourage them to try a variety of foods, which leads to a long-lasting, healthy lifestyle. This lets them develop important life skills at an early age, which will help them become independent later in life.

Kids Who Participate in Cooking

- Are willing to try new foods.
- Increase self-confidence by feeling like they are contributing to the family.
- Learn culture and family traditions.
- Spend quality time with parents or loved ones.
- Become exposed to a variety of healthy foods.
- Learn how to use all five of their senses.

Kitchen Safety and Best Practices

Participating in kitchen activities at an early age is a good way to teach proper hygiene and food safety practices to children.

- Teach handwashing skills: Wash for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
- Educate children on why it is important to separate raw and cooked foods, in order to avoid spreading germs from raw to cooked food, known as cross-contamination.
- Use oven mitts or potholders when handling hot pans and dishes.
- Never leave the stove unattended while cooking.
- Cook food to the correct temperature before eating to prevent anyone from getting sick.
- Use a food thermometer and show them when the food has reached a safe temperature.
- Have children help clean up dishes and wipe counters to learn how to clean and sanitize correctly.

Cooking Activities by Age

Assign kitchen tasks appropriate to a child's developmental level. Each child is different and may not fit into these suggested age ranges. Some skills may need to be adjusted until the child is safely able to complete them.

Ages 2 to 4

Kitchen activities for this age range focus on fine motor skills, abilities using hands, and following simple directions. With this age range, there may be a wide variety of skill levels, so activities may vary.

- Use measuring spoons.
- Wash fresh produce.
- Spread butter or icing.
- Mix ingredients with a spoon or their hands.
- Roll, shape, and cut dough.
- Dip foods.
- Carry unbreakable items and ingredients from one place to another.
- Pour liquids.



Ages 5 to 7

With this age group, children can start to try more difficult cooking techniques and kitchen equipment. Consider their skill level before letting them use scissors or sharp knives.

- Crack eggs.
- Clean and sanitize counters.
- Mash soft foods, such as fruits, hard-boiled eggs, and vegetables.
- Juice fruits.
- Measure dry ingredients.
- Cut using a small knife.
- Make sure they have their hand in the proper form to keep their fingertips from getting injured.
- Beat cake batter and fold in egg whites.
- Peel oranges.

Ages 8 to 11

Kids in this age range require less supervision but are not completely on their own. Consider giving them more freedom in planning meals and completing simple recipes without help.

- Use a vegetable peeler.
- Whisk with a handheld mixer or whisk.
- Open cans.
- Read recipe directions and complete the steps.
- Plan a meal for the family.

Ages 12+

This age group has the opportunity to have more freedom in the kitchen to prepare complex recipes, as well as being able to make changes to a recipe if they feel confident. Supervision is required in order to make sure they are being safe and practicing proper sanitation.

- Understand what certain kitchen equipment is and know how to work it.
- Follow instructions.
- Work on time and patience.
- Understand the basic science of cooking.
- What happens when I apply heat/cold to this food?
- Identify and pair different textures and flavors.

References

- [Kids in the Kitchen](#), Clemson Cooperative Extension
- [Involve Kids in Planning and Preparing Meals](#), Government of Canada
- [Cooking with Kids](#), University of Arkansas Extension
- [Cooking with Kids in the School Garden](#), Rutgers

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