



## Tips & Ideas for Experiencing The Joy of Cooking with Kids of All Ages

Cooking with your kiddos is not only fun and educational – it's also a great way to encourage them to expand their culinary horizons since children are more likely to eat what they help make. So to help you get started, below is a brief outline of just a few of the age-appropriate cooking activities you and your children can enjoy together.

### Age 9 months to 2 years

Why not start early and introduce your wee tots and emerging toddlers to the exciting sights, sounds and smells of the kitchen. For little ones who are mobile, place them in their high chair and give them a separate bowl and spoon to mix foods that are age appropriate for them. Be sure to talk to your babes about what you are doing as they watch you working in the kitchen. Don't underestimate how much their little minds are absorbing during this fun time spent with you!

### Ages 2 – 3

*Toddlers and young preschoolers are working on their large and fine motor skills, so it's helpful to stick to simple activities such as:*

- wiping table tops
- adding premeasured ingredients to a recipe
- tearing lettuce, snapping beans, washing fruits and veggies
- mixing, stirring and mashing simple ingredients (use an extra large bowl to curtail messes)
- using a cookie cutter or biscuit cutter
- helping to put trash in the trash can

### Ages 4 – 5

*Children in this age group are ready to begin the fun of more complex tasks, so offer experiences such as:*

- learning to measure dry and liquid ingredients (larger size measurements)
- kneading & shaping dough
- snipping herbs with dull scissors
- cutting soft foods with a blunt knife (such as pears, bananas, etc.)
- helping to set and clear the table
- learning to hand wash unbreakable items
- sweeping up crumbs on the floor

### Ages 6 – 8

*Youngsters in this age group are perfectly capable of handling all of the former tasks, plus are ready to take on even bigger assignments such as:*

- learning to read and follow a recipe
- gathering utensils and ingredients
- learning more advanced fine-motor skill tasks such as whisking, grating, peeling, breaking eggs, etc.
- learning to cut semi-soft fruits & veggies using a kid-safe knife
- advanced measuring of dry and liquid ingredients (smaller size measurements)
- washing dishes and putting away ingredients and utensils

### Ages 9 – 12

*Kids in this age group still need adult supervision, but they can easily manage to tackle more advanced jobs such as:*

- helping complete a simple recipe from start-to-finish
- learning to operate small appliances like blenders, mini-choppers, electric mixers, juicers, etc.
- learning safe knife skills for chopping, dicing, mincing and cutting
- learning to use the stovetop and oven safely (start with small tasks under careful supervision and help your children work their way up from there)
- learning safe food handling (especially with regard to meats/poultry)
- learning to load/unload dishwasher

### Teens

*At this age, it's important to foster your teen's growing independence, so rather than having them help you at every meal, turn the tables and have them take more initiative, with you offering to help them. Here are some tasks that help teenagers continue to grow in their confidence and independence in the kitchen:*

- planning and preparing an entire meal for their family, or a family in need
- making shopping lists and shopping for ingredients
- helping younger children learn about real food and how to prepare it
- experimenting with tweaking and developing new recipes

### Ideas for Making Mealtimes More Fun

- **Use butcher paper as a tablecloth** and provide a few crayons at each place-setting so family members can draw funny pictures (or play Pictionary) while eating.
- **Create or use conversation cards** with topics of interest to the majority of family members. These can help to spark both interesting and funny conversations at the dinner table.
- **Move meals to other locations**, instead of always eating at the dining room table. For example: Host a family picnic in the living room, backyard, park or beach.
- **Plan a Theme Night** – This can be anything from something as simple as a cultural-themed dinner such as Italian night, to a favorite story-themed meal such as making Stone Soup together or Green Eggs Ham (*simply add a dash of spirulina powder to eggs, then scramble*). Another fun theme is Fancy Restaurant Night. Set the mood with a tablecloth and candle, and have each family member volunteer for a role to play such as chef, hostess and waiter.

*Remember, your time in the kitchen with your precious little ones is so much more than just teaching them valuable cooking and healthy eating skills, it's about sharing and enjoying time together – building strong bonds and happy memories!*

For more helpful tips and strategies for cooking with your kids, as well as a bunch of kid-friendly recipes, please visit the [Kids in the Kitchen](#) section of TheNourishingHome.com.

Lots of blessings to you and yours, ☺ Kelly

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*Source: Some ideas presented in this document were inspired by Clemson University's helpful research on developmentally appropriate activities for cooking with children.*