

# FitFUTURE

Strategies for  
Better Living.

## COOKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN



by Susan Figaro Grace, MEd, RD, CWC

**S**pending time in the kitchen preparing meals with your child will provide lasting memories, as well as an opportunity to teach him/her practical skills. Cooking allows families time to communicate and connect, especially after a long day at school or work.

### Here are some helpful tips to get you started:

- 1 Have the Right Attitude** - Invite children to help with meal preparation when you don't have a tight schedule and your child is well rested. Express to them that cooking is fun. If you know you will have trouble with allowing your child to be messy at first or not being in control of the cooking consider asking a grandparent or other family member or friend for support.
- 2 Choose the Right Tasks** - Plan ahead when deciding what you will be preparing. Consider simple meals with 5 ingredients or less. Limit wait-time between tasks to help keep their interest. Measuring, mixing and reading the recipe are some simple steps that they can be involved in. Easy recipes might be a pancake mix, muffin mix, making a salad. Also making mini pizzas by setting up the ingredients in a row so that all your child has to do is place the ingredi-

ents on the English muffin or prepared pizza dough.

- 3 Establish Safety Rules** - For example, sharp knife tasks and hot pans will be removed from the stove or oven by a parent/adult. Also turning the stove and oven on and off will be done by a parent/adult.
- 4 Demonstrate Safe Food Handling** - wash hands before, during and after meal preparation. Use a separate cutting board for meats and vegetables. Also when making food with raw eggs such as cookie dough or cake mixes ask children to refrain from licking the beaters or spoon. Regardless of how good it tastes, raw eggs can harbor bacteria that may cause food poisoning, and young children and the elderly are more susceptible due to a compromised immune system.

### There are so many benefits to cooking together:

- 1** School aged children can learn a skill many adults haven't mastered: how to cook a healthy meal.
- 2** Children who are exposed to cooking at a young age learn everyday skills that they can carry on into adulthood. Measuring food, reading food labels, cutting foods safely, and washing

hands before, during and after meal preparation are skills for a lifetime.

- 3** Research has shown that involving children in meal preparation, grocery shopping and/or growing their own fruits or vegetables in a garden increased their willingness to try new foods offered.
- 4** Cooking with your child is an opportunity to share some stories about food you used to eat as a child and why you liked it. Perhaps it is a favorite recipe your grandmother prepared as part of your family heritage.
- 5** During meal preparation you can share some information on healthy eating and good nutrition. Start by asking your child how you can add more color to the meals. They may surprise you and come up with some creative suggestions. Another way of framing it is to ask them to think about foods that depict the colors of the rainbow. Foods bright in color such as fruits and vegetables are

### LEARN MORE

The Nemours Foundation  
<http://kidshealth.org>

United States Department of Agriculture  
<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

