

# Kids in the Kitchen

Help kids develop a love of healthy foods.  
Teach them to create healthy meals.

## Kids aged 2 and younger can:

- Play with plastic measuring cups, spoons, containers, or a bowl of water
- Learn to say names and colors of foods being used
- Smell foods and, depending on the food, taste small amounts



## Let 3-year-olds try to:

- Rinse and scrub fresh produce
- Tear, snap, or break foods
- Use a cookie cutter to cut shapes in dough
- Pluck fruits or leaves from stems
- Dip foods into dips
- Arrange foods on a plate
- Help stir ingredients together in a bowl



## Let 4-year-olds try to:

- Measure ingredients
- Cut with a plastic or dull butter knife
- Squeeze juice from fruits
- Shake ingredients in small containers, such as jars or zip-top bags

## Let 5-year-olds try to:

- Help grate cheeses and vegetables
- Crack and beat eggs
- Peel oranges



Continued >

## Kids in the Kitchen continued &gt;

**Let 6-8-year-olds help:**

- Read the recipe
- Crack eggs
- Measure small amounts of ingredients
- Use an egg beater
- Rinse, scrub, and peel onions, carrots, cucumbers, and other produce
- Grate cheese and vegetables
- Decorate cookies
- Spread soft frostings and spreads
- Roll out and shape dough
- Cut soft foods with a plastic or dull butter knife

**Let 9-13-year-olds start to:**

- Follow recipes and make simple meals by themselves
- Use electrical tools like blenders and mixers
- Open cans
- Drain cooked pasta in a colander
- Remove trays from the oven with adult supervision

**Kids can also help:**

- Set and clear the table
- Clean up
- Get out ingredients and equipment and put them away

- **Start simple.** Make recipes with just a few steps until you learn what each child can do.
- **Let your experience be your guide.** Adjust the tasks you assign based on your child's skills.
- **Supervise.** Make sure kids know the rules of kitchen safety from the start.



# Mealtime: It's a Family Thing

Cook together. Eat together. Talk together.  
Make mealtime a family time.

## Find time to make meals and memories together:

- Set a goal to add just one more family meal to your week.
- Remember that family meals can be a quick morning breakfast or lunch on a weekend.
- Be flexible with the time and place.

## How to make family meals happy:

- Get everyone involved! Give everyone a job to do before, during, and after the meal.
- Focus on each other! Turn off the TV, video games, and cell phones.
- Set a relaxing mood! Play soft music and decorate the table.
- Set ground rules! Choose rules that promote respect, like no bad-mouthing food and no talking while others talk.
- Make mealtime a learning time! Talk about where your foods come from. Discuss eating traditions in other cultures.

### Talk about things that everyone can enjoy! Ask questions like:

What made you laugh today?

What's the best thing that happened to you today?

What are you looking forward to about tomorrow?

What is something nice you did for someone else today?

What did you learn today?



# Set a Healthy Example

They learn from watching you. Eat healthy foods and your kids will too!

## Model healthy eating habits for your kids:

- Let your children see you eat and enjoy many healthy foods.
- Be open to trying new foods with your kids.
- Practice portion control.
- Eat meals at regular times. Try not to skip meals.
- Turn the TV and video games off at mealtime. Silence your cell phones.
- Join children at the table for meals.



## Talk about fun and happy things during meals. Ask kids questions like:

- What made you laugh today?
- What's the best thing that happened to you today?
- What are you looking forward to about tomorrow?
- What is something nice you did for someone else today?
- What did you learn today?

I will also set a healthy example by:

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# Raising a Healthy Eater

Help children learn to make healthy choices on their own. It's a lesson they will use for life.

## Have healthy foods ready to eat.

- Want kids to reach for healthy foods? Make sure healthy foods are in reach.
- Keep plenty of fruits and vegetables in the house to add to meals and snacks.

## Let kids learn by serving themselves.

- Follow a regular meal and snack schedule so kids know what to expect.
- Serve foods family-style.
- Teach them to take small amounts at first. Use smaller bowls and plates so they don't take too much at once.
- Tell them they can get more if they are still hungry.



## Be patient. It works better than pressure.

- Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer them many times, and try serving them in different ways.
- When you offer children new foods, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice.

## Let kids help in the kitchen.

- Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to support trying new fruits and vegetables.
- Name their dish ("Karla's Salad"). Make a big deal of serving foods they help create.

## Use encouraging words.

- As a parent, what you say has a big impact on kids' eating habits.
- Gently guide your kids to make healthy choices with positive words.

Continued >

Raising a Healthy Eater continued >

| Change negative phrases...   | ...into positive, helpful ones!   |
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| <p>Avoid phrases that teach children to eat to win your favor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Eat that for me.</i></li> <li>• <i>If you do not eat one more bite, I will be mad.</i></li> </ul>   | <p>Support trying new foods by connecting them to the senses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This is kiwi fruit. It's sweet like a strawberry.</i></li> <li>• <i>These radishes are very crunchy!</i></li> </ul>   |
| <p>Avoid phrases that teach children to ignore fullness to win your favor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>You're such a big girl. You finished all your peas.</i></li> <li>• <i>You have to take one more bite before you leave the table.</i></li> </ul>   | <p>Help children to tell when they are full to prevent overeating.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is your stomach telling you that you're full?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is your stomach still making its hungry growling noise?</i></li> <li>• <i>Has your tummy had enough?</i></li> </ul>  |
| <p>Avoid phrases that imply children are wrong to refuse a food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?</i></li> </ul>   | <p>Let children explore the taste of the food and decide what they like.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Do you like that?</i></li> <li>• <i>Which one is your favorite?</i></li> <li>• <i>Everybody likes different foods, don't they?</i></li> </ul>  |
| <p>Avoid phrases that teach children to eat to feel better.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Stop crying and I will give you a cookie.</i></li> </ul>   | <p>Reward children with support and kind words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I am sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a big hug.</i></li> </ul>   |
| <p>Avoid phrases that make some foods, like dessert, seem better than others, like vegetables and phrases that emphasize children's dislikes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No dessert until you eat your broccoli.</i></li> <li>• <i>I know broccoli isn't your favorite, but can you give it a try?</i></li> </ul> | <p>Let children make the choices about when to try new foods. They will be more likely to enjoy it when they do. Help children understand that learning to like new foods may take time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We can try broccoli another time. Next time would you like to try it raw instead of cooked?</i></li> </ul> |

# Shopping with Kids

Make your trip to the store fun for your kids.

## Before you go to the store:

- Let kids draw pictures of the foods on your shopping list.
- Ask kids to help you decide between healthy options (apples vs. pears).
- Give your child a small, healthy snack before shopping.
- Avoid shopping at naptime.

## At the store:

- Let your kids be “produce pickers.” Help them pick out fruits and vegetables at the store.
- Have your child help you search the aisles for the foods on your list. The child can cross them off as you add them to the cart.
- Ask your child to count the number of items you need (four apples, two cans of beans).
- Talk about the color, shape, and size of items you must buy.
- Ask your child which plant or animal each food comes from, what sound the animal makes, and what the plant or animal looks like.



## Back at home:

- Have your child help you put groceries away.
- Discuss why certain foods are stored in the freezer, refrigerator, or pantry.
- At mealtime, remind kids how they helped you find the foods you are eating.
- Ask kids what they like about the color, texture, or shape of the foods.

# Making Mealtime Peaceful

Help your kids eat healthy without the fuss.

## Have healthy foods ready to eat.

- Want kids to reach for healthy foods? Make sure healthy foods are in reach.
- Keep plenty of fruits and vegetables in the house to add to meals and snacks

## Let kids learn by serving themselves.

- Serve meals at around the same time each day so kids know what to expect.
- Serve foods family-style.
- Teach them to take small amounts at first.
- Tell them they can get more if they're hungry.

**They learn from watching you. Eat healthy foods and your kids will too!**

I will set a healthy example by:

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## Be patient – it works better than pressure.

- Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer new foods many times. Try serving them in different ways.
- When you offer new foods, let kids choose how much to eat. They are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice.

## Let kids help.

- Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to support trying new fruits and vegetables.
- Give their dish a fun name (e.g., Karla's Super Salad). Make a big deal of serving foods they help create.

## Share the adventure.

- Try new foods together.
- Let your child see you eat and enjoy many healthy foods.
- Join kids at the table for meals.





# Portions for Kids

Kids need smaller portions of foods than adults.



## How much should my child eat each day?

This chart shows recommended daily amounts for young children. Use it only as a guide. The exact amount your child needs will vary based on sex, age, and activity level.

| Daily Recommended Amounts for Young Children |             |             |                |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Food Group                                   | Age 2 years | Age 3 years | Ages 4–5 years |
| Vegetables                                   | 1 cup       | 1–1½ cups   | 1½–2 cups      |
| Fruits                                       | 1 cup       | 1–1½ cups   | 1–1½ cups      |
| Grains                                       | 3 ounces    | 3–5 ounces  | 4–5 ounces     |
| Protein                                      | 2 ounces    | 2–4 ounces  | 3–5 ounces     |
| Dairy  | 2 cups      | 2–2½ cups   | 2½ cups        |

## I'm worried my child isn't eating enough. What do I do?


- Keep the amounts shown in the table above in mind. But don't worry if your child needs more or less. Each child may need different amounts.
- The amount your child eats may vary day to day too, and that's OK. Kids may need more or less depending on growth spurts or activity that day. Remember to let your child serve herself and stop eating when she is full.
- Follow the tips on the “Raising a Healthy Eater” handout (page 5).
- Serve healthy snacks to be sure kids get plenty of fruits and vegetables (see “Snack Smart” on page 28). Keep snack sizes small. Avoid serving snacks 1-2 hours before a meal.



## THE FAMILY KITCHEN: COOKING UP LIFELONG HEALTHY HABITS TOGETHER

### TODAY'S TOP TIPS

- ✓ They learn from watching you – eat healthy foods and your kids will too!
- ✓ Make your job easier. Kids are more likely to try new foods when they help choose and prepare them.
- ✓ Start young. Kids can help in the kitchen as early as their toddler years.
- ✓ Keep calm and cook on – working with kids in the kitchen may be messy. The more you practice, the better you'll get at figuring out what kitchen jobs are right for each of you.

| MAKE IT WORK AT HOME   | STAY MOTIVATED   |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Set a goal, start small.</b> Choose one new thing you'd like to try this week. Then keep it up — once it's an easy habit (and that might take weeks or months!), pick another new thing you want to try.</p>   |   | <p><a href="http://cookingmatters.org">cookingmatters.org</a><br/>Find our complete collection of quick, easy recipes, along with videos and tip lists.</p>   |
| <p><b>Fill your feeds with inspiration.</b> It's easier to stay motivated when you've got regular reminders and tips popping up on your social media feeds. Follow Cooking Matters or other channels that help you get closer to your goals.</p>   |  | <p>Follow us on Facebook <a href="https://www.facebook.com/cookingmatters.national">@cookingmatters.national</a> and Instagram <a href="https://www.instagram.com/cookingmattersnational">@cookingmattersnational</a> for regular tips and inspiration.</p> |
| <p><b>Remember that setbacks will happen!</b> That's ok — it's not all or nothing. We all have days or weeks that go off course. Start back with one small habit and take it from there. The good news is that once you've set new habits, it's easier and faster to get back on track the next time!</p>                            |  | <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/CookingMatters">@CookingMatters</a><br/>For our complete collection of video tips (including recipe videos!), check us out on YouTube.</p>  |
| <p><b>Share what you've learned.</b> Want other family members and friends to join you on this journey? Share something exciting you've learned — or better yet, feed them something delicious and healthy so they'll know it's true! Don't pressure them — let them decide when they're ready to take on new habits themselves.</p> |  | <p><a href="http://Choosemyplate.gov">Choosemyplate.gov</a><br/>This trusted site offers recipes, videos, games, and tips for eating healthy meals and snacks, and helping you raise healthy eaters.</p>  |