

Feeding Your Preschooler: Helping in the Kitchen¹

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Encouraging your child to help in the kitchen is a great way to get them more interested in the food they eat and in trying new foods. Helping out in the kitchen also allows your preschooler to learn lifelong skills. This fact sheet suggests ways to get your preschooler helping in the kitchen as well as the benefits of working side-by-side to prepare family meals and snacks.

Kitchen Helpers

Your preschooler can benefit in many ways by being a kitchen helper. S/he may be more likely to try new foods, even if s/he is a picky eater. Working on specific tasks in the kitchen helps young children feel more grown-up, confident, and important. Helping in the kitchen is also a good way for your child to learn about science, math, and foods eaten by different cultures. This also is a great time to help your child learn about where their food comes from. For example, potatoes grow in the ground, and oranges grow on trees.

Remember that cooking may take longer when children help with food preparation. You will need to demonstrate how to do things and may have to repeat some directions. Even though cooking takes longer when young children help out, it is a great time for bonding with your preschooler.

Activities

Before children help with any kitchen activities they must first wash their hands with warm water and soap. An easy way to make sure they are washing their hands long enough is to have them sing their ABC's twice while washing their hands. For more information about hand washing, including tips on making hand washing fun for your preschooler, visit <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/food-safety/hand-washing.html>.

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Keep in mind, too, that the kitchen can be a dangerous place for small children. Always keep a watchful eye on your child when they are helping in the kitchen. One way to keep your child safe is by giving him or her age-appropriate kitchen activities. The activities listed below are for a typical preschooler, but your child may develop these skills at a different age. As your child gets older, you will be able to add new activities to these lists.

2 years old

- Wash fruits and vegetables.
- Tear lettuce leaves.
- Snap green beans and snap peas.
- Break broccoli and cauliflower into flowerets.
- Turn cookbook pages.
- Hand ingredients to an adult.
- Wipe table tops.
- Put items in the trash.

3 years old

All the activities listed above, plus:

- Count and name foods.
- Add ingredients to a recipe.
- Sprinkle herbs and seasonings onto foods.
- Juice fruits with a manual juicer.
- Stir batter.
- Knead dough.
- Help make a pizza.
- Put bread in the toaster.
- Handle basic utensils.
- Open packages.
- Talk about cooking.

4 years old

All the activities listed above, plus:

- Help make salads and sandwiches.
- Crack eggs.
- Peel hard-cooked eggs and some fruits.
- Pour drinks into sturdy glasses.
- Set and clear the table.

5 years old

All the activities listed above, plus:

- Help measure dry and wet ingredients.
- Use a dull knife to cut soft fruits.
- Use an egg beater to mix eggs.
- Grate cheese.
- Load the dishwasher.

It's important to make cooking and eating fun and exciting, so get creative. Try the kid-friendly recipe for fruit "pizza," which your preschooler is sure to enjoy, but remember to have them help.

Kid-Friendly Recipe: Honey-Bunches-of-Fruit Pizza

Serves: 1

Ingredients

- 1 whole grain English muffin
- 1 tablespoon of honey
- ½ small banana, sliced
- ¼ cup blueberries
- ¼ cup strawberries, sliced



Directions

1. Slice English muffin in half and toast until golden brown. Your child could put the English muffin halves in the toaster and press down on the lever.
2. Spread 1 tablespoon of honey on both halves of the toasted English muffin.
3. Your child could measure the honey or help spread the honey on the English muffin halves.
4. Top English muffin halves with banana slices, blueberries and strawberry slices. Your child could place the fruit on the English muffin halves or help cut the banana with a dull knife. Have your preschooler count how many blueberries are used or explain to them where honey, blueberries, bananas, and strawberries come from.

Learn More

For more kid-friendly recipes and activities refer to the following websites:

- *Fruits and Veggies: More Matters* – www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org
- US Department of Agriculture. *Choose MyPlate* – www.ChooseMyPlate.gov
- Florida Department of Health. *Kids in the Kitchen: A Recipe for Learning* – www.doh.state.fl.us/ccfp/Nutrition/NutritionEd/KidsInKitchen.pdf

To learn more about feeding your preschooler, use the resources listed below:

- Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Educator (look in the blue pages of your telephone book.) Florida Extension offices are listed online by UF/IFAS at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu>.
- Ellyn Satter. *How to Get Your Kid to Eat but Not Too Much*. Berkeley: Publisher's Group West, 1987. Print.