



Let's Get Cooking!



| BY ROBIN DEROSA LUNDGREN |

If you're looking for new ways to spend quality time with your kids, fire up the oven and involve your kids in the preparation of family meals.

The kitchen is a natural source of curiosity for young children. Everyone eats and even the busiest of parents cook sometimes, so everything you need is already in place. With a few modifications, even very young children can have a hand in preparing everything from appetizers and side dishes to main courses. Best of all, your kids will gain a lot from working side by side with you.

In the kitchen, your kids can learn to read recipes and follow directions, learn about weights and measurements, and can begin to learn basic kitchen skills, something they'll be able to use throughout their lives. With childhood obesity and Type II Diabetes on the rise, this also gives you a chance to teach them about healthy eating.

You may also find that your picky eaters will become a bit more adventurous in trying new things because of a feeling of ownership, says Melanie McKula, a registered dietician in Great Falls.

"Kids will be more willing to try foods if they had a part in the preparation," McKula says. "They think, 'I made this, therefore I want to try it', instead of Mom always saying, 'here this is good, try a bite.'"

To get started cooking with your kids, pull a sturdy stool or chair up to the counter, or use your kitchen table as a work surface. Have your kitchen stocked with a set of individual measuring cups to make measuring easier, a mixer or blender for ingredients that are difficult to stir by hand, and a food chopper to make chopping vegetables easier and safer for small hands. It's also good to have several small plastic bowls for kids to crack eggs into or mix things in.

Most importantly, remember to start small and have fun together! While your kids might not be whipping up soufflés anytime soon, you

may find that they are just as proud of their culinary creations.

Mini Turkey Burgers

1 lb. ground turkey
2 Tbsp ketchup
1/2 tsp Italian seasoning
1/4 c. shredded parmesan cheese
16 slices bread
Assorted burger toppings (ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, pickles, etc.)

1. Parents should preheat the oven to 350.
2. Give your child a 2 inch cookie cutter or juice glass, and have them cut 2 circles from each slice of bread and place them on a baking sheet.
3. Have kids place ground turkey in a large mixing bowl with ketchup, seasoning and cheese and mix together with a large spoon.
4. Let kids shape meat mixture into 16 small patties. (A small scoop can help to keep the portions even.) Place the patties on a foil lined baking sheet.
5. Parents can place burgers in the oven and cook for 15 minutes or until they reach desired doneness.
6. Remove burgers from oven and broil bread for 2 minutes or until lightly browned.
7. Kids can assemble burgers by placing one burger patty on a toasted circle of bread, add desired toppings and top with another circle of bread.

2. Let kids add cheese, seasoning, oil, salt and pepper. Have them seal the bag and shake to combine.

4. Kids can pour potatoes onto a foil lined baking sheet coated with cooking spray.

5. Parents, place baking sheet in the oven and bake for 25 minutes or until soft inside, stirring once during cooking.

4. Remove from oven and serve.

This Helps Develop...

Both of these recipes help stimulate a younger child's cognitive skills by following multi-step directions, counting from one to sixteen and from one to thirty-two, and recognizing the circle shape. Parents can encourage conversation by guiding an ongoing narrative as to what they are doing during each step of the recipe. (Ex. "We are cutting round circles out of the bread.")

Fine motor skills, the use of small muscle movements in the hands that occur in coordination with eyes, are practiced when scooping the meat mixture, picking up toppings, sealing and shaking a zipper bag, and pressing foil onto a cooking tray.

Social emotional development involves a child's feelings of self worth, confidence and pride as well as their ability to get along with others in a group setting. Children love to learn by imitating their parents' actions. This is especially true in the kitchen where children will experience the joy of making something from scratch and the pleasure of sharing their creation.

Parmesan Potato Wedges

4 medium potatoes
1/2 c. shredded Parmesan cheese
1/2 tsp Italian seasoning (or other seasoning blend)
1 tsp olive oil
1/2 tsp pepper
1/2 tsp salt

1. Parents should preheat oven to 375.
2. Parents, cut potatoes into 8 wedges.
3. Have kids place potatoes in a large resealable bag.

This monthly family activity series, "Hands-on Kids!" is brought to you by a partnership between the Children's Museum of Northern Virginia (CMNOVA) and FAMILIES Magazine. For more activities you can do with your children to spark their love of learning, visit the CMNOVA web site at www.cmnova.org. CMNOVA is committed to building a place where our children can freely explore and develop a lifelong love of learning. Robin DeRosa Lundgren, Vice President of Aquarian Entertainment and Production Services, is a writer, creator of a kid's cooking show, and a volunteer with CMNOVA.