

FUELING THE FUTURE: GETTING KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT

Every March we celebrate National Nutrition Month. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics selects an annual theme that invites everyone to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthy eating habits. This year's theme for National Nutrition Month is "Fuel for the Future." There is no better way to "fuel the future" than getting kids in the kitchen! Teaching children basic kitchen skills empowers them to take these values and skills into adulthood.

Why It's Important to Get Kids in the Kitchen

Children of all ages benefit from helping cook and prepare meals. It can be difficult to teach children about healthy eating in a way that they find exciting, but research shows that enforcing healthy eating alongside the hands-on experience of food preparation can provide a more fulfilling learning experience. In addition to learning about healthy eating practices, they can solidify their learnings with associated sounds, smells, and tastes.

Another wonderful reason to get kids in the kitchen is that children are more likely to consume foods they have prepared themselves. This encourages trying and eating a variety of foods because they want to eat their creations. Kids who help in the kitchen feel a sense of ownership that allows them to develop their own relationship with food. Not only will their perspective of food change, it encourages quality family time. One of the best ways to encourage health for the whole family is to cook at home. Cooking together can provide many benefits for kids such as building language, problem solving, and math skills.

Introducing kids to cooking at a young age is often linked with improved overall well-being and health-related quality of life. Including kids in cooking activities creates an opportunity for nutrition education. It can also help develop some responsibility for their own health and promote a sense of cultural understanding. Eating is a basic human function, so getting kids to be a part of the process can open so many doors for them. Plus, preparing and eating meals together is a wonderful family bonding experience.

How to Get Kids into the Kitchen

- Invite kids into the kitchen while you cook to familiarize them with the environment.
- Prepare ingredients on a low table or use a stepstool so that kids can reach.
- Designate special tools for your child to use such as spoons, bowls, and even aprons!
- Delegate age-appropriate tasks to your child
 - Helping measure ingredients
 - Stirring and mixing
 - Opening packages
 - Chopping with a child-safe knife
 - Setting the table
- Involve kids in meal planning – ask them their favorite foods and meals.
- Bring your child grocery shopping so they can be a part of selecting ingredients for recipes. You could even make it a game such as a scavenger hunt!





Most importantly, allow kids to be curious. If they pick out a fruit or vegetable you're not familiar with, make it a family activity to learn how to prepare and enjoy this new food item. Who knows – you may find a new family favorite!

Kid-friendly Kitchen Resources

Check out these resources for additional tips on getting your kids into the kitchen and kid-friendly recipes:

- The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: For Kids (<https://www.eatright.org/for-kids>)
- USDA MyPlate (<https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/kids>)
- Healthy Family Project (<https://healthyfamilyproject.com>)
- Super Healthy Kids (<https://www.superhealthykids.com>)

RECIPE CORNER: CHEESY BROCCOLI BITES – MAKES 20 BITES

Now that you know why and how to get your kids in the kitchen, here is a quick, easy, and nutritious snack to make together.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups broccoli florets, fresh or frozen (thawed)
- 2 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup panko (Japanese bread crumbs)
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

PREPARATION:

1. Steam broccoli just until fork-tender (skip this step if using thawed frozen broccoli).
2. Add broccoli, eggs, salt, panko, and Parmesan cheese to a food processor; blend just until finely chopped. Using 1 tablespoon at a time, form into balls.
3. Heat the oil in a skillet. Drop balls of broccoli mixture into hot oil, flattening with a spatula. Cook both sides until crispy.
4. Serve warm and crispy.

Recipe: <https://www.superhealthykids.com/cheesy-broccoli-bites/>

To learn more about National Nutrition Month, visit <https://www.eatright.org/national-nutrition-month>

How can you get your kids and family members more involved in the kitchen?



Mandy Enright MS, RDN, RYT, is a Registered Dietitian, Yoga Instructor, and Corporate Wellness Expert, as well as main content contributor for Wellness Concepts. Mandy is a featured presenter, both virtually and onsite near her home in Neptune, NJ.

