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PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN

DECEMBER 2011

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: COOKING WITH YOUR KIDS

Cooking with your child can be a lot of fun and a great experience for both of you. It is a chance for kids to take part in preparing something for the whole family to enjoy and can be a great confidence booster. On the learning side, cooking involves reading (choosing a recipe), math skills (measuring ingredients) and even a little science (what happens when heat is applied to the recipe, such as when dough rises).

For many people, the kitchen is the center of the home. It is the area where everyone comes together. All ages can help out in the kitchen:

- **Little children** — You probably will not get help from them in preparing a meal, but you can give them empty bowls and spoons and let them practice stirring and mixing. This age group can also help with gathering all of the ingredients. Talk to them while you are cooking so that they can see and hear what you are doing.



- **School age children** — This age group can use cooking as an opportunity to use math and science skills. For math skills, let them combine ingredients and practice things like adding fractions. It also is a good opportunity to talk about nutrition and why you are choosing the ingredients that you are using. There is a lot of science behind the chemical reactions that happen when cooking.

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- **Teens** — They can take a more active role in preparation of a meal and improve on their cooking skills. You may let them pick a new recipe to try or encourage them to try a recipe from another country and learn a little more about that country.

Take advantage of opportunities to work with your children in the kitchen. Here are a few tips and guidelines to help everyone have fun and be safe in the kitchen:

- **Plan ahead.** If your child wants to help out in the kitchen plan a time when it would be best to do so. A week night when there are several things to do before bedtime would not be a good time. Plan a time when you and your child can set aside a few hours (depending on the recipe). Make sure you have all the ingredients on hand and if not, plan when you can go and get them. Taking your child along to the store just for a few ingredients can be another learning opportunity.
- **Wash your hands.** Washing hands is always important for anyone handling food. Use soap and warm water. Scrub your hands and rinse well.
- **Set up the area.** If your child is younger, you may have to make some changes in the kitchen work area. Perhaps you will need to bring a stool in for the child to stand on. Do not forget to remove any sharp objects from their reach.
- **Keep an eye on them!** No matter what, always keep an eye on what is going on and what your child is doing.
- **Set clear rules.** Before you start, set clear rules about such things as using the stove and hot pots and pans. You want to make sure that your child does not get burned by the hot oven or stove and that they know if they can use the kitchen knives.
- **Practice math and reading.** If you need to practice reading skills, have your child read all

of the directions out loud. For math practice use the fractions (if there are any) and counting skills for younger children.

- **Make sure that set-up and clean-up are part of the experience.** There is no reason you should do all of the set-up and clean-up. Preparing to cook and cleaning up afterward are part of what it takes to be a cook. If your child wants to cook, that is part of the experience.
- **Enjoy!** Have a great time with your child. It may be messier than you would normally like, but it can be a great chance to have fun and bond with your child.

When everything is cleaned up, be sure to compliment your child on their hard work and thank them for helping you in the kitchen. Who knows, you may get a little help more often!



REFERENCES:

- Sources: Nemours Kids Health. Cooking with Kids, May 2008

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