

## Cooking with Your Preschooler

Just as children naturally explore books, sand, play dough and other materials, they love to explore cooking. Let your preschooler use measuring spoons, spatulas and other kitchen objects.

Introduce your child to cooking by **doing** and **explaining**, then let your preschooler practice that same technique. Ask questions about what is being done to further your child's learning:

- How can we keep the lemon seeds from falling into the juice when we squeeze those lemons?
- What happens when we beat the cream with a whisk?

One of the best ways to introduce cooking to your preschooler is to start with snacks. When children prepare their own snacks, they may also learn how to decide **when** and **how much** to eat. By taking personal responsibility for their own snacks, children begin to develop a healthy approach to eating. As the adult, you are responsible for what is available for snacking. Providing items that are healthy and that your child can prepare encourages them to take personal responsibility for preparing and deciding when they want to snack.



Teach your child how to wash his/her hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or the equivalent time it takes to sing Happy Birthday or Row, Row, Row Your Boat.

Help children learn where foods come from. Today, children often grow up believing that juice comes from cardboard containers. Let children prepare freshly squeezed orange juice from actual oranges. When shopping, have your child pick out an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable to buy. For example: Kiwi is an interesting "fuzzy" fruit that is beautiful inside. Let your child feel the fuzzy outside. Cut it in half and give them a spoon to scoop out the inside. Ask, "Does it taste like any other fruit?" With the other half, peel and slice it to show how pretty the slices are and how slippery the fruit is. Use the kiwi in a recipe. These kinds of experiences will encourage children to try a variety of foods including fruits and vegetables. When trying new foods, ask your preschooler questions to promote learning:

- How does it taste? Can you think of a similar taste?
- How does it feel on your tongue?
- What does it smell like? Can you think of a similar smell?
- Is it easy to chew? Does it stick to your mouth?

## Appropriate Ages and Activities for Mastering Cooking Techniques with Adult Supervision

### Age: 2-3 Years —

Stirring / mixing—Mixing pudding,  
combining ingredients in a bowl

Shaking—Shaking container of salt, making  
butter out of cream

Spreading—Putting peanut butter or cream  
cheese on crackers

Scrubbing—Washing vegetables with a  
brush

Greasing—Spreading butter or shortening  
on a cookie sheet

Tearing / breaking / snapping—Tearing  
lettuce, breaking off ends of green  
beans

Dipping—Placing bread in an egg mixture  
for French toast

Kneading—Making bread dough

### Age: 3 Years —

Wrapping—Rolling lettuce leaves around  
filling, putting aluminum foil around a  
baking potato

Pouring—Pouring glasses of milk or juice,  
filling blenders or colanders

Rolling (with a rolling pin or hands)—  
Making cookies, meatballs

### Age: 3-4 Years —

Cutting soft foods—Slicing bananas, boiled  
carrots, or cooked potatoes

Peeling with hands—Taking off eggshells,  
husking corn

### Age: 4 Years —

Cracking eggs—Tapping eggs at center  
and using hands to separate shell over  
a bowl

Mashing—Using masher or fork on boiled  
foods, bananas

### Age: 4-5 Years —

Measuring—Filling measuring cups and  
spoons

Coring, hulling, pitting—Preparing  
strawberries, cherries, apples for eating

Peeling with a vegetable peeler—  
Removing skins from potatoes, carrots

Cracking nuts—Using a nutcracker to open  
nuts

Beating—Using a hand egg beater

Cutting with a knife—Cutting cheese, hard-  
boiled eggs, bread

Grating—Grating fruits and vegetables or  
cheese



#### Sources:

- Coleman, G. & Harvey, H. (2006). Raising healthy eaters. University of Wisconsin-Extension  
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