

Little Kids Cook!

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Lesson Goal:

Learn how young children develop healthy habits by engaging in cooking and food-related play activities, and learn strategies for engaging children in developmentally appropriate activities.

Lesson Objectives:

By participating in this lesson, you will:

- Experience how young children learn about food and healthy eating habits through cooking and food-related play.
- Discuss strategies for engaging toddlers and preschoolers in developmentally appropriate cooking and food related play activities that help them develop knowledge about food and cooking.

Introduction:

Has a young child ever toddled over to you with a spoon and empty bowl, lifted the spoon to your mouth and said, "Eat! Yummy!"? Have you seen a child in the sandbox stirring sand in a bucket while saying, "I cook soup!"? Have you seen a curious toddler or preschooler digging through the kitchen cupboards and exploring the pots, pans, and containers they find? These moments of play and exploration are ways that young children let you know that they are learning about food and cooking just from watching their caregivers engage in cooking and eating routines. Young children use their natural curiosity as they explore the world around them, and this includes the experiences of cooking and eating. The early childhood years are a natural time to capitalize on this curiosity and lay a foundation of healthy eating habits.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, in a 2011 position statement, recommended using times outside of mealtimes to help children experience and explore food-related ideas. Doing so is important in developing their knowledge and feelings about food, which can help develop a foundation of healthy eating habits that children will rely on as they grow.

This lesson will provide you an opportunity to explore how young children learn about food and healthy eating habits through cooking and other food-related play experiences. There are many opportunities for caregivers to teach young children about healthful eating habits in the kitchen as well as in playtime activities.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines state that young children learn best through play and hands-on experiences. It is important to remember that each child develops at his/her own pace. This means some children will display interest or capabilities to participate in certain types of activities earlier or later than other children who are the same chronological or numerical age. The activities presented in this lesson are geared towards children ages 2-5 years. You may notice younger toddlers (18-24 months) expressing interest in food and food-related play, such as pretending to cook and talking about the taste of food. These younger children may participate in dramatic play activities such as feeding their dolls or cooking in a play kitchen. Therefore, some of these activities could be used with toddlers under 2 years old. This socio-dramatic or "pretend" play should be encouraged as individual children begin to express interest.

By participating in this lesson, you will gather ideas for fun activities and practical strategies that will make these times successful and enjoyable learning opportunities for toddlers and preschoolers.

Activity 1: Bountiful Baskets

You and your group will be looking at food and food-related items in several baskets. Together, you will brainstorm ideas for how these items could be used to engage children in play and cooking activities. Record your ideas on the participant handout in Table 1 so you are ready to share your ideas with the larger group.

Activity 2: Cooking Together

The conversations and hands-on experiences of cooking provide opportunities for children to engage their senses and learn about food. Examples of age appropriate food preparation tasks and verbal comments to encourage children to explore different foods are on the participant handout in Table 2. Begin by looking at the Cooking Together handout (Table 2) and discussing with your group members the kinds of cooking activities toddlers and preschoolers would be able to do independently and with assistance. You will then gather the ingredients for the snack you (or your group leader) have chosen to create and prepare the snack with your group while discussing ways you might guide and engage young children in the same activity.

Activity 3: Recipe Roundup

As you prepare one of the recipes provided on Handout 3, think about and discuss with the group:

- The preparation tasks that are appropriate for toddlers and preschoolers.
- Things you can do to keep children safe during the cooking experience.
- The types of questions or comments you could make to encourage children's thinking during the cooking experience.

Resources:

Available Online:

Cooking with Your Kids, Georgia Jones, UNL Extension Community Lesson:

- Leader's Guide — <http://tinyurl.com/unlextensionHEF554>
- Participant Guide — <http://tinyurl.com/unlextensionhef555>

Food Fun for Young Children, Cami Wells, UNL Extension: Food, <https://food.unl.edu/fnh/food-fun-for-young-children>

Kids a Cookin, Kansas State University Extension, <http://www.kidsacookin.ksu.edu/>

Kids in the Kitchen, Clemson Cooperative Extension, http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/nutrition/nutrition/life_stages/hgic4113.html

Available in Print:

The Cooking Book: Fostering Young Children's Learning and Delight, Laura J. Cokler, National Association for the Education of You (2005)

Pretend Soup and Other Real Recipes: A Cookbook for Preschoolers and Up, Mollie Katzen, Tricycle Press; First Edition (1994)

Salad People and More Real Recipes: A New Cookbook for Preschoolers and Up, Mollie Katzen, Tricycle Press (2005)

The Mom and Me Cookbook, Annabel Karmel, DK CHILDREN (2005)

The Toddler Cookbook, Annabel Karmel, DK CHILDREN (2008)

B is for Baking: 50 Yummy Dishes to Make Together, Sesame Workshop and Susan McQuillan, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 1 edition (2011)

C is for Cooking, by Sesame Workshop and Susan McQuillan, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 40th Anniversary Edition (2009)

Activity 1: Bountiful Baskets

Table 1. Bountiful Baskets Activity

What is in the basket? List the items.	How can young children use these items in food-related play or cooking activities?	What questions or comments could an adult make to encourage children's learning?	Where could children use these items (e.g., sensory table, sandbox, play kitchen)?
Kitchen Tools			
Food Containers			
Food Items			

Activity 2: Cooking Together

Recipe to Prepare	Developmentally Appropriate Tasks	Questions to Encourage Conversation
Mixed fruit or vegetable salad	Children can help wash fruits and vegetables at the sink. You will want to be sure they also wash their hands thoroughly before and after they have their turn. Preschoolers (3½ -5 years old) can slice soft fruits such as bananas, strawberries, or melon with a dull knife. For a vegetable salad, children can tear lettuce or other greens, dice small pieces of tomato or other soft veggies with a dull knife. Teach children how to hold the knife properly and keep their fingers out of the way. Children can choose the fruits they wish to have in their own salad and prepare their own portion. This will help avoid spreading illness among children in a group setting.	<p>What color are the different fruits in this mix?</p> <p>Which fruits do you think are crunchy and which fruits are soft?</p> <p>Where did this fruit grow? On a tree or in the ground?</p> <p>What are the different colors you see?</p> <p>What are the different shapes you see?</p> <p>Which vegetable do you think is most crunchy?</p> <p>Which vegetables are in your salad?</p>
Yogurt parfaits	Children can scoop plain yogurt into their individual bowls from a container. They can then use smaller scoops to add toppings to their parfaits from bowls of toppings. For preschoolers, you can put numbers next to the bowls of toppings to encourage them to count a specific number of scoops they may take from the bowls (e.g. two scoops of strawberries, one scoop of dry cereal, three scoops of banana slices, etc.)	<p>Is the yogurt smooth or does it have chunks?</p> <p>How many scoops of strawberries did you add?</p> <p>Are you going to mix your parfait ingredients with your spoon?</p> <p>Is the yogurt sweet or tart?</p> <p>Do you have more strawberries or more cereal?</p>
Spreading hummus on pita bread	Toddlers and preschoolers can scoop hummus from a bowl with a spoon and use either the back of the spoon or a dull knife to spread the hummus on pita bread. Toddlers may need assistance to learn the spreading motion. Preschoolers will likely be able to do this task on their own.	<p>The hummus is so creamy, so it can spread on the pita bread.</p> <p>What other types of spreads can we use on bread? (Examples: butter, jam, peanut butter)</p> <p>What shape is the pita bread?</p> <p>What ingredients are used to make the bread?</p>
Cheese cubes or cutting cheese slices with cookie cutters	Children can use cookie cutters to cut shapes out of sliced cheese. Older children also may be able to use a dull knife to cut small cubes of cheese from their own portion of a block of cheese. With assistance and supervision, older preschoolers can help shred a block of cheese using a grater.	<p>What shape are the cubes?</p> <p>What are the different kinds of cheeses?</p> <p>How does cheese feel on your tongue? Hard or soft and creamy?</p>

Activity 3: Kid Friendly Recipes★

Chili Bean Dip 4 servings

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| 2 c. cooked dried beans or 1 (15 oz.)
can pinto beans, drained and rinsed | 2 T. onion, chopped |
| 1 tsp. chili powder | ½ c. Cheddar cheese, shredded |

1. In a medium bowl, mash beans.
2. Add chili powder, onion, and cheese. Mix well.
3. Serve warm with tortilla chips or serve cold with raw vegetables.



Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 150, Total Fat 6 g (9% DV), Saturated Fat 3 g (16% DV), Cholesterol 15 mg (5% DV), Sodium 410 mg (17% DV), Total Carbohydrate 17 g (6% DV), Dietary Fiber 5 g (21% DV), Sugars 1 g, Protein 9 g, Vitamin A 6%, Vitamin C 2%, Calcium 15%, Iron 10%.

Young children can:

- Mash beans with a fork or masher
- Measure ingredients with assistance
- Add ingredients to the bowl
- Mix ingredients with a spoon



Mango Tango Black Bean Salsa 16 servings

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 mango | ¼ c. onion, finely chopped |
| 1 (15 oz.) can black beans, drained
and rinsed | ¼ c. fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped |
| 1 (7 oz.) can whole kernel corn
with peppers, drained | 2 T. lime juice |
| | 1 tsp. garlic salt |
| | ¼ tsp. ground cumin |

1. Wash and peel the mango then cut in half length-wise. Throw away the seed. Cut into ¾-inch cubes.
2. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients and mix well.
3. Refrigerate until ready to use.
4. Serve with tortilla chips.



Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 30, Total Fat 0 g (0% DV), Saturated Fat 0 g (0% DV), Cholesterol 0 mg (0% DV), Sodium 250 mg (11% DV), Total Carbohydrate 7 g (2% DV), Dietary Fiber 2 g (7% DV), Sugars 3 g, Protein 1 g, Vitamin A 2%, Vitamin C 8%, Calcium 2%, Iron 2%.

Young children can:

- Measure ingredients with assistance
- Talk about which ingredients are added in large or small quantities
- Add ingredients to the bowl
- Stir ingredients with a spoon

*Recipes courtesy of the Nutrition Education Program (NEP).

Frozen Fruit Cup

6 servings

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 c. applesauce, unsweetened | 1 (11 oz.) can mandarin oranges, drained |
| 1 (10 oz.) pkg. frozen strawberries, thawed | 2 T. orange juice concentrate, thawed |

1. In a medium bowl, combine all the ingredients. Mix well.
2. Spoon into small freezer-safe containers.
3. Freeze at least 4 hours, or until firm.
4. Let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes before serving.

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 60, Total Fat 0 g (0% DV), Saturated Fat 0 g (0% DV), Cholesterol 0 mg (0% DV), Sodium 0 mg (0% DV), Total Carbohydrate 16 g (5% DV), Dietary Fiber 2 g (6% DV), Sugars 8 g, Protein 1 g, Vitamin A 15%, Vitamin C 90%, Calcium 2%, Iron 4%.

Young children can:

- Pour mandarin oranges into a strainer to drain the juice
- Add ingredients to the mixing bowl.
- Stir the mixture with a spoon.
- Help scoop the mixture into small containers for freezing



Orange Slushie

4 servings

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1 (6 oz.) can frozen orange juice concentrate | 1/2 tsp. vanilla |
| 1 c. low-fat milk | 4 ice cubes |
| 1/2 c. water | |

1. Place all the ingredients in a blender and process on high until smooth. Serve right away.

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 90, Total Fat 0.5 g (1% DV), Saturated Fat 0 g (0% DV), Cholesterol 5 mg (1% DV), Sodium 30 mg (1% DV), Total Carbohydrate 19 g (6% DV), Dietary Fiber 0 g (0% DV), Sugars 19 g, Protein 3 g, Vitamin A 6%, Vitamin C 100%, Calcium 8%, Iron 0%.

Young children can:

- Measure ingredients with assistance
- Pour ingredients into the blender
- Push button to turn on the blender (with adult supervision)



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Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. Circle a number for each.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. This topic is important to me and addresses issues that I need to know more about.	1	2	3	4
2. Following my participation, I am more knowledgeable about the topic covered.	1	2	3	4
3. The information covered in this lesson will impact my life in a positive way.	1	2	3	4
4. I will share this information with others who could use this information.	1	2	3	4
5. The activities in this lesson would be easy to implement with young children	1	2	3	4
6. The activities in this lesson would be difficult to implement with young children.	1	2	3	4

What new ideas or activities from this lesson will you try with your program or family?

What information from the lesson was most helpful?

What changes could improve this lesson?

Please share any other feedback with our team so we may improve our programs.

Demographic information

1. I am:

- ☐ Under 29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70 or older
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Ethnicity:

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Not Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Race: (Mark one or more)

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian/Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. Are you attending this program as a part of a club, group, organization, agency, etc.?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, please specify what club, group, organization/agency or other:

Please mail to:

The Learning Child Team
c/o Dr. Dipti Dev, Assistant Professor: Child Health Behaviors Specialist
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Or you may scan and email this form to ddev2@unl.edu.