



Supporting Content

Mothers of Preschoolers on Cooking and Eating Together

The following content supports messages on role modeling and offers mothers additional tips, strategies, and encouragement to facilitate behavior change. This content reflects tips, strategies, and language that resonated with mothers during our focus group testing. See the section of the guide on “Putting the Messages Into Practice” (page 16) for ideas on how to incorporate the messages and supporting content into your nutrition education activities.

Cooking and Eating Together

Message 1: Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.

Message 2: Make meals and memories together. It’s a lesson they’ll use for life.

Bulleted Tip Style Content (Eating Together):

It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals. But it’s worth it and the whole family eats better.

- Start eating meals together as a family when your kids are young. This way, it becomes a habit.
- Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.
- You may not be able to eat together every day. Try to have family meals at least four times a week.

How to make family meals happy

- Focus on the meal and each other. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later.
- Talk about fun and happy things. Try to make meals a stress-free time.
- Encourage your child to try foods. But, don’t lecture or force your child to eat.

Fast family meals

- Cook it fast on busy nights. Try stir-fried meat and vegetables, quick soups, or sandwiches.
- Do some tasks the day before. Wash and cut vegetables or make a fruit salad. Cook lean ground beef or turkey for burritos or chili. Store everything in the fridge until ready to use.

Text Box Style Content (Eating Together): Talk to me!

What made you feel really happy today?

What did you have to eat at lunch today?

What’s your favorite veggie? Why?

Tell me one thing you learned today?

What made you laugh today?

Bulleted Tip Style Content (Cooking Together):

Teach your kids to create healthy meals. It's a lesson they'll use for life.

- Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables.
- Kids feel good about doing something "grown-up." Give them small jobs to do. Praise their efforts. Their smiles will light up your kitchen.
- Kids love helping in the kitchen. Parents love knowing that their child is also learning skills they'll use for life. Help teach them to follow instructions, count, and more!

Prepare fruits and veggies together.

- Children learn about fruits and vegetables when they help make them. And all of that mixing, mashing, and measuring makes them want to taste what they are making. It's a great trick for helping your "picky eater" try fruits and vegetables.

-

On busy weeknights...

- Cooking together can mean more "mommy and me" time on busy days. Ask your child to help with easy tasks, like adding veggie toppings to a cheese pizza.
- Let your child choose which veggies to add to soup. Only an adult should heat and stir hot soup.
- Make sandwiches together.

Make some meals special.

- Have a color contest and see how many green, red, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables you can include in one meal.
- Name a food your child helps create. Make a big deal of serving "Karla's Salad" or "Corey's Sweet Potatoes" for dinner.
- Try a "Make Your Own" night. Let your family put together its own soft tacos, sandwiches, pizza, or salads. Place the ingredients within easy reach and let the fun begin.

Text Box Style Content (Cooking Together):

Cooking Activities by Age

2-year olds	3-year-olds	4- to 5-year-olds
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make "faces" out of pieces of fruits and vegetables.• Scrub vegetables or fruits.• Tear lettuce or greens.• Snap green beans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add ingredients.• Stir.• Spread peanut butter or other spreads.• Shake a drink in a sealed container.• Knead bread dough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peel some fruits and vegetables, such as bananas.• Peel hard boiled eggs.• Cut soft fruits with a plastic knife. Only adults should use sharp knives.• Wipe off counters.• Mash soft fruits, vegetables, and beans.• Measure dry ingredients.• Measure liquids with help.