

Cooking for Little Ones

Cooking for toddlers and growing children presents some unique challenges along the way. While you want to provide them with those ever so important nutrients, it is often difficult to get them to eat those foods that are best for their growing bodies. We are all probably well aware of the food pyramid and the number of servings our children need of healthy grains, proteins, fruits, vegetables, and calcium products. Getting them to eat these nourishing products is another matter all together unfortunately.

The good news when cooking for children is that you do not necessarily need to incorporate all the important nutrients into dinner food. The truth of the matter is that raw cucumbers, which are thinly sliced and sprinkled with salt make a much healthier snack than potato chips and many little ones love this for a snack. You get a vegetable in their system and they are getting a treat at snack time. The same holds true for melon and cantaloupes. These make excellent snacks and are a much-needed fruit in these important diets for little ones.

When it comes to cooking for little ones, however man, woman, and child cannot live on macaroni and cheese alone. It's been tried and tested and failed miserably. Try mixing things up whenever you can while keeping meals kid friendly. It is important that you try to introduce whole grains, proteins, and vegetables whenever possible at meal times around your home. The good news is that there are many prepackaged convenience foods that are introducing whole grains like never before in order to meet the growing demand of consumers for healthier meals that can be prepared with little fan fare or fuss.

Cooking healthier meals for kids is now easier than ever before. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best whenever possible. However, if you cannot manage fresh, you should avoid canned (fruits especially as they are often swimming in sugary sweetness) whenever possible. Frozen is far preferable to canned when it comes to both fruit and vegetables, as there are often fewer additives.

If you need some great meal ideas that are kid friendly and easy on the budget, you can often find recipes readily available online. You can meet your child's calcium and dairy product needs by adding milk as the drink of choice for meals or a slice of cheese melted over their favorite vegetable. Ice cream, yogurt, and pudding also make excellent calcium rich treats, in moderation of course.

Encourage your children to try new things rather than cooking the same few meals over and over again that you know they are likely to eat. This prevents two things from happening. First of all, it helps you not to get bored when cooking for your children. Second, it allows your children to try new flavors and

textures and form opinions about them. By trying new things they will learn not only about the things they dislike but also the foods they really enjoy.

You should also keep in mind that your children are people too when cooking for them. Just as you have foods you like and dislike they also will develop tastes over time. Those tastes may also change in time as well. It's frustrating, I know, to spend time and money preparing a meal only to have your child push the plate away and refuse to even try the meal. For this, I recommend enlisting their help in the kitchen. Children are much more likely to eat the things they had a hand in preparing as a matter of accomplishment and pride. It's psychological warfare I know but all is fair in war and dinnertime.

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give yourself (much greater than the help in the kitchen) by 'forcing' your little ones to help prepare dinner is that they will learn to better appreciate your culinary efforts and eat peacefully rather than sullenly. This tactic has met with great success in my household when cooking for little ones. I hope you will enjoy the same degree of success as well.

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