

Help your little chefs get cooking in the kitchen!

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

Nearly every day we hear about the epidemic of childhood obesity. Is it a result of our fast food lives, and too much processed, quick cook foods? Some experts say yes. Cooking from scratch has become a lost art; children no longer stand on the chair beside mom as she makes a meal. Budget cuts mean no more Home Economics in schools. Add to this, many families are single parent or have two working parents, limiting time for preparation and cooking.

Does this mean that we can't teach children to cook? Not at all. It shouldn't take all day to prepare a meal; in fact most can be put together in less than 15 minutes and cooked in less than an hour. The key is in the planning. Knowing ahead of time what you are cooking means you are more likely to have supplies on hand. One of the best resources for menu planning help is your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) extension office. Pendleton's branch is located at Blue Mountain Community College in Umatilla Hall. You'll also find lots of info online at snaped.fns.usda.gov/resource-library/handouts-and-web-sites.

You may find children are more willing to sample new foods when invited to participate in the preparation. Children's kitchen tasks should be developmentally appropriate. Some five-year-olds can use a potato peeler with ease, others will struggle, and resources are available to guide you in what is



age-appropriate. Again, the extension service online is an excellent resource, providing information on cooking with children and on food/kitchen safety and recipes.

At age two, children are able to wash vegetables, tear lettuce into bit-size pieces, wipe counters and do other things that don't require well developed fine motor skills – in fact, these chores can help with that development. By three or four, some children will be able to count and name foods, stir with a little assistance, pour liquids (not hot) and spread things like peanut butter, jam and butter. At this age, children typically have developed the finer motor skills necessary to pick up small pieces of food and place them on a plate or in a bowl.

By five, children should be able to cut soft fruit, cheeses or meats into small pieces using a plastic knife (with adult supervision). They

should be able to crack eggs, measure dry ingredients and, with assistance, liquid ingredients. You may find they are able to stir thick batter, however, you will need to stabilize the bowl for them.

As your child grows, they will master more skills. Some children are responsible enough to use a stove and work with hot pans, liquids, etc., when they are eight, other children

won't be ready until ten or eleven. Your judgement as the parent and supervision is critical. Our house rule was no one under 13 could use the stove/oven if a parent was not home. The key is patience, guidance and positive thinking; children are capable of more especially when encouraged.

Why not have the kids help with Thanksgiving preparations? I remember learning to make piecrust with my mom. After putting the pies in the oven, she would give us the leftover dough and allow us to roll it out sprinkle with cinnamon sugar and roll up into "cinnamon rolls." The recipe below was passed from my grandmother to my mom then on to me; it truly is no fail.

We were also responsible for setting the table, putting together the relish plate, and making the salad. Mom would also have us help her peel potatoes and then mash

them with warmed milk and melted butter. Cooking was not "women's work" in our home; my three brothers learned to cook from my mom also. I have very fond memories of us all preparing meals together.

MOM'S NO FAIL PIE CRUST

2 cups flour
1 cup shortening, butter or lard
½ cup water, cold
1 teaspoon Sugar
dash of salt

1. Mix together flour, sugar and salt
2. Blend in shortening (with pastry blender or two knives) until mixture is crumbly
3. Add water and stir with a fork until well blended.

Roll out dough on floured surface. You can work with this crust a number of times and it remains flaky after baking. Use flour as necessary when rolling out the dough.

Makes enough for a two-crust pie or two single-crust pies.

Children who cook should also know how to clean up, so establish that expectation early, cleaning up their messes as they make them. Cooking at home is typically healthier and less expensive than eating out. Teaching our children to cook can reduce dependence on highly processed, high caloric foods and save your family money.

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