

Cooking keeps kids from getting bored

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Kids feeling bored after all the excitement? It seems that we build up so much expectation for Christmas and all the preparation that goes with it that there's a real let down after the big day. Why not turn that boredom into a plus instead of a minus?

It takes some patience on the part of the parents, babysitters, or older kids in the family, but kids can learn a lot in those early years.

Even early grade school age kids can learn some shopping skills if you take the time to point out the ads, and make your lists and menus together. It always seemed to me that my kids were more interested in the meals if we had made menus together. They were certainly more willing to try new recipes if they had a chance to help pick them out. In our family, we posted the menus so there was an easy answer for the question—What's for dinner? However, there is a drawback to this system; you have some explaining to do to little ones if you do too much changing. They figure if it's down in black and white that it's carved in stone.

There are other things that help with shopping that you can have them do. They can lick those promotional stamps or cut out coupons and get them organized.

It's also very useful to teach them some cooking skills. It can really come in handy if they have a few easy casseroles or family favorites they can do if you need help fixing a meal. It also gives you a great chance to compliment them and thank them for their help.

There are several very good cookbooks on the market that are written for boys and girls. They give greater detail, have the proper reading level and are good about cautioning the kids about the safe way of doing things. They also feature easy but fun recipes, have party ideas and foods and emphasize nutritious snacks.

You should start teaching children to cook with very simple and easy recipes. They tend to compare themselves with the adults in their lives and may decide they can't cook as well as you can, so they don't want to try. Success is great for the self-image, so have them start with something simple enough that it's a sure thing.

How do you choose the right thing? If the child is very young, it might be something as simple as whipping the eggs for scrambled eggs. It may mean having some convenience foods that you normally do without.

Some of the traditional activities, such as sugar cookies made with cookie cutters, are not a good choice for young children. The adults end up doing all the work because the skills needed are beyond the abilities of a young child. Modeling cookies make a much easier special cookie. Kids can work the dough into long ropes and then can make letters or simple shapes. Much less supervision is needed and the cookies are really their project and their success.

GINGERBREAD MODELING COOKIES

This dough is particularly good for young children. It withstands several additions of flour and much patting and rolling. They can make long ropes or snakes. Then place on a lightly greased cookie sheet in letters or simple shapes. Flatten slightly with the fingers.

Cream together 1/2 cup butter or margarine and 1/2 cup brown sugar.

Beat into creamed mixture:

1 egg
1 tablespoon water

Combine:

3 1/2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

Add dry ingredients half at a time. Work last quarter by hand. Divide down into balls. Model cookies 1/4-inch thick. Bake at 350° for 10 minutes on lightly greased cookie sheet.

Here are two tasty but simple casseroles that kids can make. The Chinese Hamburger recipe was my son's specialty. After he moved away from home, he had to call for the recipe because he was hungry for it.

CHINESE HAMBURGER CASSEROLE

Brown:
1/2 pound hamburger
1/2 of a medium onion, chopped
Drain off fat. Put in 2-quart casserole.
Add:
11 Oz. can of cream soup.
Stir well. Then add:
1/4 cup raw rice
1/2 cup chopped celery
1 cup water
2 tablespoons soy sauce

Bake 1 hour at 350°. In last 20 minutes you can add a small can Chinese noodles, if desired.

TACO CASSEROLE

1 pound hamburger
1 4 oz. can chili
1 small can tomato sauce
1 package corn chips
Brown hamburger. Add chili and tomato sauce. Put cornchips in the bottom of a 13" x 9" cake pan and pour hamburger mixture over it. Bake in 350° oven for 25 to 30 minutes. When heated through, remove from oven and sprinkle with:
1 cup shredded cheese
shredded lettuce
chopped tomato
Serve with taco sauce.



Nothing hits the spot on a chilly winter evening better than hot soup. Soup is always an easy dish for children to make. Throw in a few croutons or let your child season to taste with a variety of herbs.

School Menu

January 17: Texas chili, mixed vegetable salad, honey glazed cinnamon roll, pineapple, milk.
January 18: Lasagna, tossed salad, French bread, tangerine, milk.
January 19: Hot dog on a bun, baked beans, apple wedges, granola cookie, milk.
January 20: Chicken patty, potato salad, apple muffin, banana half, milk.
January 21: Cheeseburger, lettuce, pickle, tomato, potato triangle, peach slices, milk.

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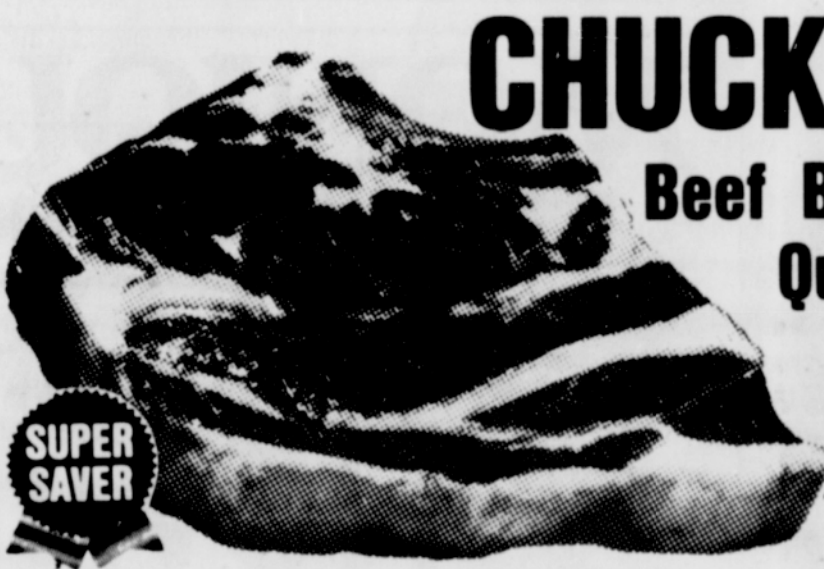
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