

# Tips for Cooking With Kids

1. **Have the basics ready to go.** Spend some time by yourself setting up the ingredients and equipment. This way, you can get started right away when you kids come into the kitchen. While you don't have to measure everything out, the kids will squirm less with some of the prep work done.
2. **Wash your hands.** Before you begin cooking, set some good hygiene rules – wash hands before cooking, and after handling raw meat, trash or using the bathroom.
3. **Read the recipe together and determine a “plan of attack.”** As you read the recipe together (take turns reading aloud, if possible), discuss how you'll do things and in what order. Although the recipe provides plenty of direction, decide if you'll follow the recipe exactly, spread out the cooking steps, or do things simultaneously.
4. **Have your kid check the ingredients.** They can double check that everything is out, and get the oven ready to go.
5. **Set ground rules for kids and decide what's off-limits.** This depends largely on the age of your kids and how much experience they have in the kitchen. Younger kids should always stay away from sharp and hot objects. Older kids may be able to do some simple blending, cutting, and grating with assistance. Leave anything complicated or involving high heat to adults.
6. **Give kids work to do on their own.** Kids will have more fun if they have plenty to do. With your assistance, give them tasks like measuring, pouring, stirring, and assembling. Kids can also be on “timer duty” as foods cook.
7. **Set a good example with kitchen safety.** It's up to you to show your kids the safest ways to cook. They'll learn from watching you as you use potholders, use knives to cut carefully and away from yourself, and read instructions carefully.
8. **Don't sample food before it's cooked!** It can be tempting to take a nibble of food before it's done, especially baked goods. But food that hasn't been properly cooked can contain bacteria. Even the best raw cookie batter isn't worth the risk of salmonella.
9. **Have your kids test the food to see if it's done.** Does the food match the finished description in the recipe? Set the timer for food, but let kids be the judge if it's really done. Is it “golden brown” like the recipe said? Is the middle bubbling like it should be? Does a toothpick stuck in the cake come out clean?
10. **Have fun and don't worry if the dish doesn't come out perfectly.** A mangled cookie is still a good cookie. Worrying too much about the end result takes all the fun out of cooking. Relax and go with the flow. Even when you make a mistake with a recipe, it's best to see where it takes you – it might even be better than the original idea!

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# Bringing a Recipe Full Circle

1. **Pick the recipe together.** Look through a cookbook together, and have your kids play a big part in choosing the recipe. They'll have more fun making it, and eating it, if they have a say.  
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2. **Make restaurant food at home.** Think of favorite foods from restaurants and try to recreate them in your own kitchen. You can encourage eating at home by bringing homemade versions of restaurant food to your table. From chicken fingers to lasagna, there are bound to be recipes available for the foods you love at restaurants.  
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3. **Try to plan healthy meals.** Cooking at home is the perfect opportunity to make nutritious meals with less of the salt, fat, and preservatives you'll find in some restaurant and store-bought foods. It's a great way to show your kids that great food can (and should) be healthy.  
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4. **Make a cooking schedule.** Make cooking together a regular event. You and your kids can pick a day to cook together – every Friday, or the first Sunday of the month. If you want, you can also have a more whimsical schedule, like baking cookies on rainy weekend days.  
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5. **Go shopping together.** Once you've decided on a recipe, make a shopping list together. Go to the grocery store with your kids and have them help select each item. Consider having a budget for the shopping list. Older kids can bring a calculator and make sure you stay within your limits. This may give them a new perspective on asking for treats – once they see how much money can be spent on unplanned junk food, they may think twice about asking for those chips or cookies.  
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6. **Read the labels with your kids.** Part of shopping for a recipe means buying the right amount of food. And if you're trying to cook healthier versions of foods, you may have to choose between a couple versions of an ingredient. Have your kids read the labels with you, both for the size and nutritional content. Decide together what the best choice is.  
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7. **Put the food away together.** Younger kids especially need to learn basics about what goes in the refrigerator, what goes in the freezer, and what can be stored in the cupboard. Discuss what happens to certain foods – like mold growing on cheese and curdled milk – if they're left at room temperature.  
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8. **Pick out side dishes, drinks, and dessert.** Green beans or peas? Rolls or biscuits? Milk or soda? Don't forget all the little things that can make a good recipe even better.  
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9. **Have your kids set the table and determine dinnertime.** Preparing the food is only part of dinnertime. Give your kids the responsibility of setting the table and gathering the family. This way, the kids will get to see the entire process from beginning to end.  
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10. **Plan what to do with leftovers.** Leftovers can be a tough sell for kids, but come up with some ideas together on what to do with food after the dinner. For example: Thursday's chicken can become part of Friday's salad or sandwich, while Sunday morning's bacon can be an afternoon BLT.

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