



BUL 1027

# Food and Your Family



A Brief Guide to Enjoying Food with  
Young Children and Your Family



University of Idaho  
Extension

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## Introduction

Including children in the kitchen and in the process of cooking is great family time and can help with children’s development! Inside you will find tips, recipes, resources, and more to help introduce your children to nourishing food and the joys of preparing it.



Courtesy of monkeybusinessimages (Stock 1094023140).

## Why Involving Kids in the Kitchen is Important

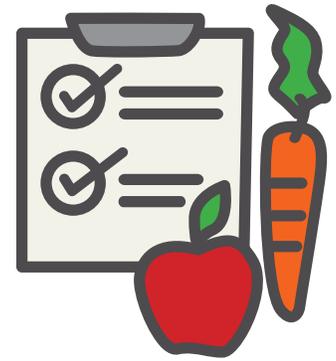
Involving your children in the kitchen and in the process of cooking can benefit you and your children in many ways:

- **Practice fine motor, communication, and cognitive skills.** Cooking and creating meals provide opportunities for young children to practice and develop many skills. Holding utensils and picking up ingredients further the development of fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Reading and talking through recipes builds communication and language skills. Measuring, counting, and following instructions to complete a task help to develop cognitive skills.
- **Family time.** Cooking is a wonderful time to spend together as family. Whether it is a small snack after school or preparing for family dinner, inviting your child to help creates time to learn and builds memories. Even babies can join by being included in a safe space in the kitchen to observe and watch.
- **Opportunity to talk about food and nutrition.** When children are involved in creating their own meals, it gives them a chance to appreciate the time that goes into cooking. As a parent, it is also a time to talk about why we need certain foods for our bodies to grow. Being involved and creating their food can help children avoid developing picky eating habits and food aversions which are common in young children.

Remember to have fun!

# Dietary Guidelines for Birth through Preschool

The 2020–25 Dietary Guidelines for Americans provides science-based guidelines for Americans and their families so they can develop healthy diets and meet the nutritional needs for healthy development.



## Key Recommendations for Infants

### *Birth to about 6 Months of Life*

- If possible, feed infants human milk only (exclusively breastfeeding). If human milk is unavailable, feed **iron-fortified** formula regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration.
- Supplement the diet of infants fed human milk or a combination of human milk and formula with **400 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily** after birth.

### *Introducing Solids after about 6 Months of Life*

- Introduce **developmentally appropriate nutrient-dense food** that complements current feeding practices (human milk or formula).
- Introducing complementary foods ensures that nutritional needs are met.
- Include foods high in **iron** and **zinc** to breastfed-only infants.

#### *Foods to Limit/Avoid*

- Added sugars
- Foods high in sodium
- Raw or unpasteurized foods
- Plant-based milk alternatives
- 100% fruit juices
- Toddler milk or drinks
- Cow milk or soy-fortified drinks as human milk replacements

#### *Foods to Introduce*

- Protein foods such as meats, poultry, eggs, and legumes
- Vegetables and fruits with vitamin C, vitamin A, and potassium
- Dairy such as yogurt and cheeses
- Grains in iron-fortified, rice, and multigrain cereals

# Key Recommendations for Toddlers

## Toddlerhood (12–23 Months)

Provide toddlers with a diet of age-appropriate foods to meet their caloric and nutritional needs (a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, oils, and protein foods).

### Vegetables

- 3/4–1 cup daily
- Dark greens, like spinach
- Red and orange, like carrots
- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Starchy, like potatoes

### Grains

- 2 1/4–3 oz daily
  - Incorporate more whole grains than refined grains
- Example: whole wheat instead of white bread

### Fruits

- 3/4–1 cup daily
- Strawberries
- Apples
- Berries
- Bananas
- Melons

### Dairy

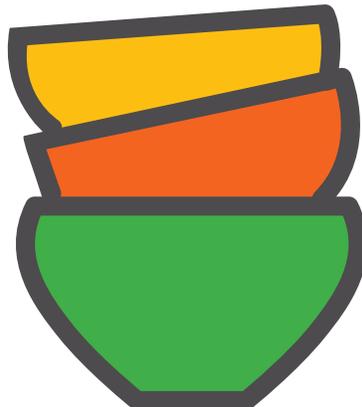
- 1 3/4–2 cups daily
- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese

### Oils

- 9–13 gm daily
- Essential fatty acids for healthy brain development

### Protein

- 2 oz daily
- Meats
- Eggs
- Seafood
- Nuts, seeds, and soy products



# Key Recommendations for Preschoolers

## Early Childhood (2–4 Years)

Females require about 1,000–1,400 calories per day

Males require about 1,000–1,600 calories per day

### Grains

- 5–6 oz daily
- Incorporate more whole grains than refined grains

Example: whole wheat instead of white bread

### Vegetables

- 2–2½ cups daily
- Dark greens, like spinach
- Red and orange, like carrots
- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Starchy, like potatoes

### Fruits

- 1½–2 cups daily
- Strawberries
- Apples
- Berries
- Bananas
- Melons

### Dairy

- 2½ cups daily
- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese

### Protein

- 4–5½ oz daily
- Meats
- Eggs
- Seafood
- Nuts, seeds, and soy products

### Oils

- 17–24 gm daily
- Essential fatty acids for healthy brain development





## Kids in the Kitchen

There are many ways to involve your children in the kitchen from a young age. Understanding what is an age-appropriate kitchen activity for your child can help them to appreciate cooking and provide them with an opportunity to succeed at a task.

Courtesy of fizkes (iStock 1252896444)

## Age-Appropriate Kitchen Tasks

### 2 Years

- Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables
- Tear lettuce or other greens
- Help count out small quantities (“Can you help me count out 3 apples?”)
- Use cookie cutters with assistance
- Mix with a large spoon

### 3 Years

- Stir together ingredients in a container with a spatula or spoon on a flat surface (not hot)
- Spread soft ingredients (peanut butter, jam, cream cheese) with a spreading knife
- Help measure dry ingredients
- Decorate cookies
- Squeeze oranges, limes, lemons
- Knead dough
- Spread sauces (like pizza)

### 4–5 Years

- Help measure out liquid ingredients
- Help mash ingredients
- Help count out small quantities (“Can you help me count out 10 carrots?”)
- Use child-safe utensils to cut ingredients
- Whisk eggs
- Stir wet and dry ingredients together
- Roll dough
- Wash dishes and clean surfaces

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# Food-Safety Tips

Following food-safety steps ensures that you are preparing the very best for your family.



## Storage

- Store perishables in fridge or freezer within 2 hours.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days.
- Cook or freeze other beef, veal, lamb, or pork meat within 3–5 days.
- Food such as meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.



## Prep

- Always wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables after removing from packaging.
- Use separate cutting boards for meats and vegetables.
- Wash boards and utensils in between uses with hot water and soap.



## Thawing

- Refrigerator—The refrigerator allows slow, safe thawing. Make sure that thawing meat and poultry juices do not drip onto other food.
- Cold water—For faster thawing, place food in a leak-proof plastic bag. Submerge in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook immediately after thawing.
- Microwave—Cook meat and poultry immediately after microwave thawing.



## Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour if the temperature was above 90°F).
- Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for fast cooling.
- Use cooked leftovers within 3–4 days.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F.

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# Recipes

## Homemade Baby Food–Baby’s First Green Smoothie

### INGREDIENTS

- 1/8 cup water, more as needed
- 2 cups spinach, chopped
- 2 mangoes, peeled, cored, and diced
- 2 pears, peeled, cored, and diced
- 1 avocado, peeled, cored, and diced



Courtesy of PeterHermesFurian (iStock 535191703)

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add water to a medium saucepan over low heat.
2. Add spinach. Cover with lid. Cook until wilted, stirring occasionally.
3. Add diced mangoes and pears and more water as needed to the saucepan. Cover with lid and heat 3–5 minutes until the fruit is fork-tender.
4. Place spinach, mangoes, pears, and avocado into food processor or blender. Process until smooth, adding water as needed.
5. Remove infant’s portion and allow to cool before serving.
6. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in ice cube trays until frozen solid. Package in freezer-safe containers or plastic bags and label with name and date. Use within 6 months for best quality.



*Spinach is full of important vitamins like folate and vitamin C.*

*Pears are a source of vitamin C and fiber.*

*Avocados are a good source fiber and lutein.*

Source: adapted from <https://feedingmybaby.extension.illinois.edu/homemade-baby-food/baby-food-recipes/>

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# Homemade Baby Food–Carrot Cake Puree

Courtesy of Cadamek (iStock 504314788)



## INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup water (plus more as needed when using blender)
- 2 large apples, cored, peeled, and chopped
- 5 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 tsp cinnamon

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add water, apples, and carrots to a medium saucepan.
2. Cover with a lid and bring to a boil.
3. Once it has reached a boil, turn to low and simmer until fruit is fork-tender (about 10–15 minutes).
4. Pour cooked produce and any remaining water into a food processor or blender. Blend. Add water, 1–2 Tablespoons at a time and blend to reach desired consistency.
5. Add cinnamon. Blend until incorporated.
6. Remove infant's portion and allow to cool before serving.
7. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in ice cube trays until frozen solid. Package in freezer-safe containers or plastic bags and label with name and date. Use within 6 months for best quality.



*Apples are a source of vitamin C.*

*Carrots are a source of vitamin A and fiber.*

Source: adapted from <https://feedingmybaby.extension.illinois.edu/homemade-baby-food/baby-food-recipes/>

# Bell Pepper Pizza Boats

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 bell pepper, any color
- 1/4 cup pizza sauce, low-sodium
- pinch dried oregano
- pinch dried basil
- Toppings
  - Turkey pepperoni
  - Olives
  - Spinach
  - Onion
  - Mushroom
  - Tomatoes
  - Anything your family enjoys!
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat mozzarella cheese, grated (or any cheese)



Courtesy of freeskyline (Stock 1217361255)



*Bell peppers are a great source of vitamin C.*

*Add turkey or chicken as a source of protein.*

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Wash bell pepper under cold water, then dry with a clean towel. Slice the bell pepper long ways to create four pieces (boats).
3. Prepare toppings by washing as needed and chopping into small pieces for sprinkling on pizza.
4. Lay slices inside up on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet.
5. Spoon sauce to cover inside of each bell pepper boat.
6. Sprinkle on toppings, oregano, and basil.
7. Top with cheese.
8. Bake for 15–20 minutes.



*Kids can help wash veggies!*

*Kids can pick out their toppings and place them!*

*This is a good recipe to incorporate what you have on hand.*

Source: adapted from [https://eatSMARTidahointhekitchen.com/wprm\\_print/3063](https://eatSMARTidahointhekitchen.com/wprm_print/3063)

# Personal Veggie and Sausage Foil Packets

Courtesy of Nadezhda\_Nesterova (iStock 1314551793)



## INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound fresh green beans
- 2 bell peppers (any color)
- 1 medium onion
- 1 small zucchini
- 1 lemon (optional)
- 4 low-fat pre-cooked turkey or chicken Italian sausages
  - Alternative proteins, such as black beans, lentils, or chickpeas
  - Fish, such as salmon or trout
- 1 Tbsp minced garlic
- 2 Tablespoons oil
- black pepper to taste
- aluminum foil, for cooking on



*Using salmon can be great source of essential fatty acids, like omega-3.*

*Adding a variety of vegetables can help meet vitamin and dietary fiber needs.*



*Kids can help wash veggies!  
Kids can help placing food in foil and sealing the package.*

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat your grill to medium-high heat. If baking, preheat oven to 425°F. Wash all vegetables and lemon. Trim the beans, roughly chop the peppers and onion, and slice the zucchini and lemon into rounds.
2. Slice sausages into 1/8–1/4 inch rounds.
3. Combine veggies, sausage, and garlic in a large bowl, except the lemon. Drizzle with oil and season with pepper. Toss to combine and evenly coat.
4. On sheet pan, lay out four 15-inch pieces of aluminum foil. Divide the mixture equally on all four pieces, placing ingredients in the middle of each piece of foil. Put 1–2 lemon slices on top of each packet. Fold foil to seal individual packets completely. Use another layer of foil, if needed.
5. If grilling, place the packets directly on the grill and cook for about 20 minutes, flipping halfway through. If baking, place sheet pan on middle rack of oven and cook for about 20 minutes. Check after 12 minutes. Sausages should be at an internal temperature of 165°F when done. Unwrap and enjoy!

Source: adapted from <https://eatsmartidahointhekitchen.com/2021/07/15/sausage-and-vegetable-foil-packets/>

# Low-Prep Beef and Vegetable Soup with Chickpeas

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds beef stew meat, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 cans (14–14½ oz each) reduced-sodium beef broth
- 1 can (15 oz) no-salt-added chickpeas or white beans, undrained
- 1 can (14½ oz) no-salt-added diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1/2 cup water
- ¼ teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon parsley
- ½ teaspoon basil
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
- 1 cup uncooked ditalini or other small pasta



12119729984)  
iStock  
Courtesy of Andrei Kravtsov



*Beef is great source of iron and zinc!  
Chickpeas can be a great source of protein and fiber!*

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine beef, broth, chickpeas, tomatoes, water, oregano, parsley, basil, garlic powder, salt, and pepper in a 4½–5½ qt slow cooker; stir to coat well. Cover and cook on HIGH 5 hours or on LOW 8 hours. (No stirring is necessary during cooking.)
2. Stir in mixed vegetables and pasta. Continue cooking, covered, 1 hour or until beef and pasta are tender. Season with salt and pepper, as desired. Stir well before serving. Serve with cheese, if desired.



*Kids can help add ingredients to the slow cooker before the heat is turned on.*

**Parent Tip:** For early eaters (6–12 months) some pasta can be difficult to pick up. Those that are easier to handle for self-feeding are about the size of an adult pinky finger and include rigatoni, penne, rotini, and cavatappi.

Source: <https://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/recipes/recipe/4446/lazy-day-beef-vegetable-soup>

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# Additional Resources

## Articles About Picky Eaters and How to Help

<https://extension.psu.edu/abcs-of-growing-healthy-kids-picky-eaters>

<https://extension.unr.edu/healthykids/pub.aspx?PubID=2901>

## WIC Infant Nutrition and Feeding Guide—United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

<https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/infant-nutrition-and-feeding-guide>

## MyPlate for Preschoolers—USDA

<https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/preschoolers>

## Food Phrases That Help and Hinder

<https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2020-12/PhrasesThatHelpAndHinder.pdf>

<https://extension.unr.edu/healthykids/pub.aspx?PubID=2907>

## National Institutes of Health/National Library of Medicine—Child Nutrition Information

<https://medlineplus.gov/childnutrition.html>

## Idaho Beef Council—Feeding Beef in the Early Years

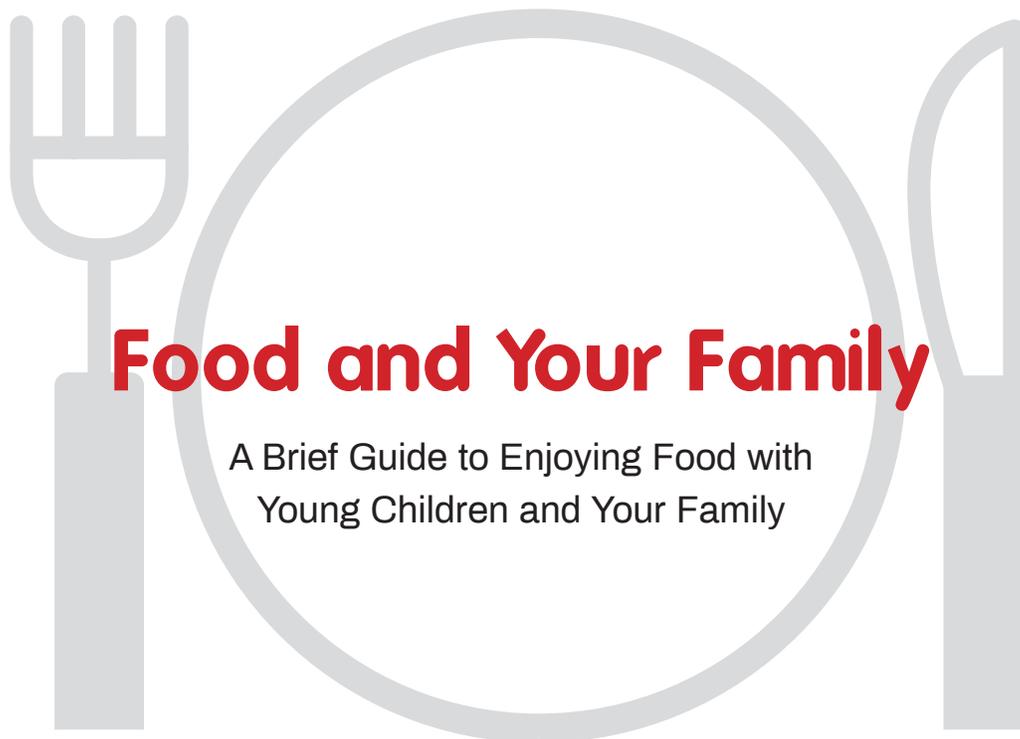
<https://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/nutrition/beef-in-the-early-years>

## Eat Smart Idaho—Recipes, Tips, and More

<https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/eat-smart-idaho>

## Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–25

[https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Americans\\_2020-2025.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)



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