

# AGE APPROPRIATE TASKS IN THE KITCHEN

It's never too early to start including children in the food preparation and clean up processes in the kitchen. There are so many fun and easy opportunities and roles children can play. The following is a list of age appropriate tasks you can begin to implement as you pass along the joy of food and cooking to your kids.

1. **Cooking With 0-1 Year Olds** – For the first few years, the best way to involve the little ones may be by having them observe and be with you as you cook.
  - a. Bring them in the kitchen while you cook
  - b. Set them up somewhere safe (e.g. a highchair or playpen)
  - c. Let them play with a few utensils like wooden spoons or measuring cups
  - d. Let them smell and touch some of the ingredients and tell them what you are cooking
  - e. Once old enough, let them taste some of the ingredients
  
2. **Cooking With 2-3 Year Olds** – Children of this age like to explore using their senses of sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste. They are also quick to let you know they can do it themselves. They will need lots of instruction and supervision, but will do most tasks with great enthusiasm. Be ready to let them try some of the following:
  - a. Wash fruits and vegetables in the sink
  - b. Add items to dishes (e.g. cheese to the omelet)
  - c. Smell different spices and seasonings as well as different foods (e.g. lemons, squash)
  - d. Help find ingredients in the fridge, pantry, or cupboards
  - e. Put paper cups into muffin tins
  - f. Pour dry and liquid ingredients into bowls
  - g. Scrub potatoes
  - h. Brush oil or butter with a brush
  - i. Sprinkle salt or herbs
  - j. Mash vegetables
  - k. Stir batter in a bowl
  - l. Sweep the floor or hold the dust pan
  - m. Put dishes in the dishwasher or sink
  - n. Taste ingredients as you cook, along with eating the cooked dish



3. **Cooking With 4-5 Year Olds** – This age group is quickly learning to use their fine motor skills, so this is a good time to advance the opportunities and give them more detailed work. They will likely still need lots of help and supervision, so be patient. You could have them:
  - a. Cut soft foods with a plastic knife
  - b. Roll out and knead pizza or bread dough
  - c. Juice lemons and limes
  - d. Crack an egg
  - e. Measure and level dry ingredients with a straight edge
  - f. Spread butter and jam
  - g. Set a timer
  - h. Whisk a vinaigrette
  - i. Peel a cooled hard-boiled egg
  - j. Set the table
  - k. Rinse dishes that aren't too heavy
  - l. Clean the countertops
  - m. Taste ingredients as you cook along, with eating the cooked dish
  
4. **Cooking With 6-8 Year Olds** – By this age, children have learned a lot of the basics and are ready for more complicated tasks and to try out some of the kitchen equipment. Each child is a bit different, so only you will really know when your child is ready to use a small knife or the stove. This is also a good time to have your child reading the recipes with you. Try some of these tasks:
  - a. Use a small paring knife
  - b. Cook with you at the stove
  - c. Use a can opener or garlic press
  - d. Peel fruits and vegetables
  - e. Grate cheese
  - f. Whip cream with a hand mixer
  - g. Grease a baking pan
  - h. Scoop batter into muffin cups
  - i. Scrape down the mixer bowl
  - j. Make simple cold spring rolls or tortilla wraps
  - k. Toss salad ingredients together with a dressing
  - l. Write the grocery list
  - m. Put their own breakfast together
  - n. Slice bread
  - o. Help put the groceries away
  - p. Load and unload the dishwasher
  - q. Taste the ingredients as you cook, along with eating the cooked dish



5. **Cooking With 9-12 Year Olds** – Kids at this age are more coordinated and able to understand appliances. Try letting your kids:
- a. Cut cooked meats, cheese, and tofu
  - b. Use the microwave with your help
  - c. Make their own school lunch
  - d. Make a fresh fruit platter to go with dinner
  - e. Use the stove to make basic recipes like pancakes, soups, or grilled cheese
  - f. Decide what is needed to balance out a meal so it has food from each food group
  - g. Taste the ingredients as you cook, along with eating the cooked dish

