



# Inspiring

# Young Cooks



# to Create Recipes!



# Let's Inspire Young Cooks!

There is both a science and an art to cooking that's appealing to kids and teens. Not only do they gain an important life skill, but a study from the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* suggests that developing cooking skills while they're young may have long-term benefits in both health and nutrition into adulthood.\* Confidence in the kitchen "led to fewer fast-food meals, more meals as a family, and more frequent preparation of meals with vegetables."

While cooking, kids and teens learn about food safety, nutrition, math, science, and develop fine motor skills. In addition, time spent preparing meals "stirs" the imagination, and can even lead young cooks to create their own recipes!

This guide is intended to help any adult work with young people to get them started with kitchen and food safety, age-appropriate skills, and inspiration!



Larson, N., Laska, M., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Winkler, M., & Utter, J. (2018). Self-perceived cooking skills in emerging adulthood predict better dietary behaviors and intake 10 years later: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 50(5). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2018.01.021>

# Kids & Teens in the Kitchen

Before starting, it's best to have a few rules in place. These rules will help prevent kitchen injuries and lay the groundwork for food safety. Kids, teens and adults should follow these rules every time!

## Keep tasks age-appropriate

When working with young cooks, it's important to keep their skill and maturity levels in mind.

**Grades 1 to 5:** Kids in this age range have developed fine motor skills and can tackle a variety of tasks, including:

- Use a vegetable peeler
- Prepare lettuce and herbs for salads and sandwiches
- Chop softer vegetables, like tomato or zucchini, with kid-friendly knives
- Use a can opener
- Check temperatures of prepared food using a food thermometer
- Whisk or stir batters, sauces and dressings

**Grades 6 to 12:** By the time young cooks reach middle and high school, they may require only minimal adult supervision. If they're just learning to cook, start with simpler tasks and move up from there. These include:

- Cooking items on the stove, like pasta, eggs and soups
- Preparing foods in the microwave
- Baking dishes and desserts
- Using sharp knives
- Planning and preparing a family meal



# Food Safety at Home

[Research shows](#) that people who follow recipes with food safety instructions are more likely to practice food safety behaviors. Consistently practicing food safety behaviors will help reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

## Basic food safety steps

Young cooks need to follow safe food handling practices when preparing food at home. These steps include:

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- When using the oven, stove or sharp knives, an adult should always be present.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before moving on to the next food.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs separate from cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- Don't eat raw batter or dough! No licking fingers or putting hands in mouths. Wait until food is cooked before tasting.
- Use a food thermometer to check that food is cooked to proper temperatures. Check out the [Safe Minimum Temperature Chart](#).
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly at 40 °F or below.



**Learn about the Core Four  
food safety practices!**



# Develop a Safe Recipe

Whether you're helping young cooks develop a recipe or writing your own, the steps are the same to create a delicious, safe recipe.

- **Look for inspiration.** This can come from anywhere but can be as simple as adding a unique twist on a favorite dish or using up ingredients in the fridge or pantry.
- **Do some research.** Find out what's out there to get an idea of ingredients, ratios, techniques, times, and temperatures.
- **Decide what makes your recipe different.** Maybe it's making a dairy-free creamy potato soup or incorporating vegetables into traditional shrimp and grits, every cook adds their own special twist.
- **Write it down.** Make a list of the ingredients in the order you'll use them and a basic outline of the steps. Instructions should be clear and begin with action words like chop, stir, whisk, bake, etc.
- **Time to cook!** Test and adjust as you go. Add cooking cues, such as "approximately X minutes" or "check when it starts to smell like..."
- **Make one change at a time.** Don't make too many changes at once. Edit your recipe one step at a time.
- **Get creative.** A strong finish is important. At the end of the recipe, try a bit of acid like lemon juice, vinegar or fresh herbs to brighten and enhance flavor.
- **Keep trying!** Cooking takes practice. Don't give up if things didn't turn out the way you wanted the first time.
- **Add food safety prompts.** Be sure to double-check the [Safe Recipe Style Guide](#) to make sure you haven't missed anything!
- **Photo finish!** Take a nice photo of your creation so everyone can see your hard work.



The Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE) is a public health non-profit organization dedicated to helping Americans prevent food poisoning at home. Free food safety education resources are available online at [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org). The Partnership is the creator and steward of the Fight BAC!® national food safety education campaign.

