

# Family Cooking = Learning Fun!

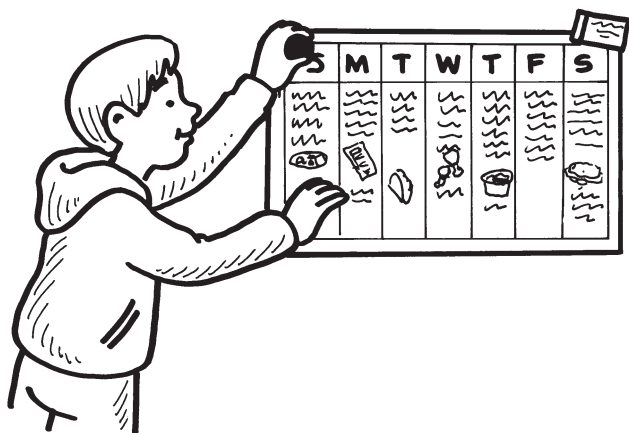
The kitchen is more than a place to cook and eat—it can also be a fun “classroom” for your children. Planning and preparing healthy meals together is a great way to build reading, math, and science skills. Plus, your kids will enjoy eating the results of their “lessons”!

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## Planning meals

### Read cookbooks

Browse through cookbooks or food blogs together, looking at the pictures and reading healthy recipes aloud to each other. You’ll find new recipes and foods, and your child will get reading practice. Encourage her to look up unfamiliar words (*sift*, *thyme*) in the cookbook glossary or in a dictionary. Earmark recipes to try, and have your youngster make shopping lists—she’ll work on writing, spelling, and organization. *Idea:* Check out cookbooks at the library. The librarian can suggest ones geared toward children.



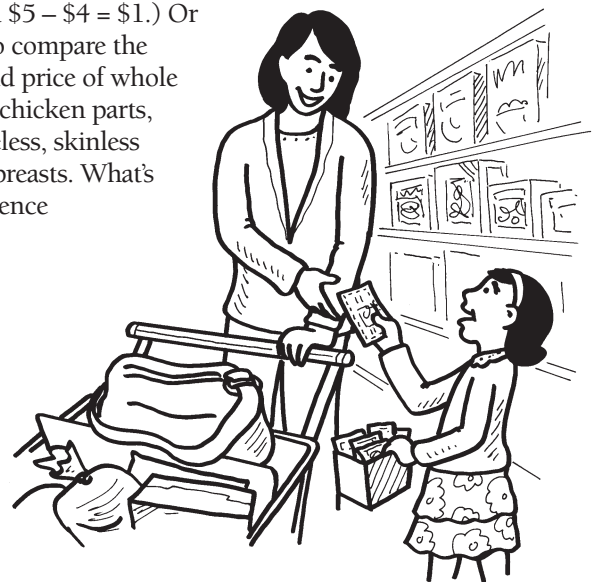
### Write a weekly meal plan

What’s for dinner this week? Let your child help you decide on a meal for each evening that includes protein, whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and dairy. For instance, say your Sunday meal will be salmon with sweet potatoes and brussels sprouts. Ask him what’s missing (grains, fruit, and dairy) and what foods could fill in the gap (brown rice and a side salad of blueberries and feta cheese). Have him make a weekly meals calendar to post in your kitchen.



### Shop for deals

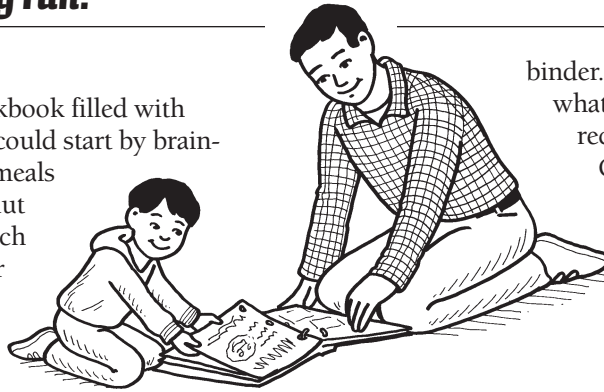
Show your youngster how you use math to save money at the grocery store and make decisions about what to buy. Before leaving home, let her look through grocery ads for coupons and sale items. Have her suggest items for your list based on what she sees. Then as you shop, help her figure out the best deals. You might say, “If frozen asparagus is regularly \$2.50, but now it’s \$4 for two bags, how much would we save by buying two bags?” ( $\$1$ , because  $2 \times \$2.50 = \$5$ , and  $\$5 - \$4 = \$1$ .) Or tell her to compare the per-pound price of whole chicken, chicken parts, and boneless, skinless chicken breasts. What’s the difference in price?



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## Create a family cookbook

Let your child put together a cookbook filled with healthy recipes for your family. You could start by brainstorming ways to make his favorite meals more nutritious (add pureed butternut squash to macaroni and cheese, switch to whole-grain spaghetti). Have your youngster write and illustrate a revised recipe for each dish and put the sheets into a three-ring



binder. Or help him make connections to what he's learning in school by finding recipes that relate. If he's studying Greece, he can add a recipe for spanakopita (spinach pie), or if he's learning Chinese, he might look for stir-fries. *Tip:* Encourage your child to be creative by coming up with his own recipes or adding twists to ones he finds.

## Preparing meals

### Measure ingredients

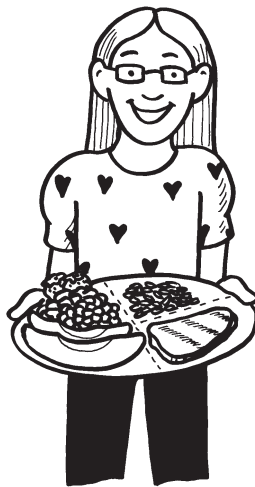


Cooking is a natural way to practice measuring. Try putting your youngster in charge of measuring ingredients when you cook. Have him experiment with different sizes of measuring cups and spoons to

discover that 3 tsp. = 1 tbsp. or 2 cups = 1 pint. Also, pose math problems as you go: "This recipe calls for  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chicken broth. We're doubling the recipe—how much broth do we need?" ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup  $\times$  2 = 1 cup.) *Idea:* Suggest substitutions or easy changes to make recipes healthier. For instance, he could use less sugar in a pancake recipe (say,  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup instead of  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup), and see if he notices a difference in the taste.

### See healthy fractions

Instead of serving your child's food, let her dish it out herself. That way, she can learn the healthiest way to fill her plate—and see fractions in action. First, go to [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) and talk about what fraction of the colorful plate each food group takes up: Vegetables and fruit cover  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the plate, grains a little over  $\frac{1}{4}$ , and protein just under  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Then, have your youngster practice using fractions at meal time. She could put peas and melon slices on  $\frac{1}{2}$  of her plate, brown rice on  $\frac{1}{4}$ , and chicken on the last  $\frac{1}{4}$ . Ask her to say the number sentence she just made ( $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} = 1$ ).



### Bake and experiment

What makes muffins and cookies rise? Your youngster can explore the science of baking with this experiment. First, find a healthy muffin recipe to try—one that includes whole-wheat flour and applesauce rather than oil is ideal. Help him make half the batch with baking soda and half without. What happens? (The ones without baking soda will turn out flat.) Explain that baking soda combines with other ingredients to produce air bubbles—and these tiny pockets of air allow the muffins to rise. *Idea:* Illustrate this idea simply with water, vinegar, and baking soda. Have your child fill a cup halfway with water, stir in 2 tsp. baking soda, and slowly add 2 tbsp. vinegar. He'll see firsthand the bubbles that are created.

### Make your own ice cream

Here's a cool, tasty way for your youngster to whip up a batch of healthier ice cream while learning about states of matter.

Help her put 1 cup milk, 1 tsp. sugar, and 1 tsp. vanilla into a quart-sized plastic freezer bag. She should tightly seal the bag, gently pressing out the air, and put that bag in a second freezer bag, sealing and pressing that one carefully as well. Next, have her add ice cubes to a large empty can with a lid (for example, a coffee can) to fill it halfway. Sprinkle the ice with 1 tbsp. salt. Then, she should place the bag inside the can, snap on the lid, and roll the can back and forth vigorously for 15 minutes.

When she opens the bags, she'll see ice cream! Explain that the very cold ice (the salt lowers the freezing point) turned the liquid mixture into a solid. And it's healthier than store-bought versions that have more sugar and fat.

*Editor's Note:* Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

# Nutrition Nuggets™