

Food for Thought

April 2025

Be a Healthy Role Model

Young children love to follow what their parents do. They often copy your table manners, your likes and dislikes and your willingness to try new foods. Here are a few tips on how to be a healthy role model:



1. **Go shopping together.** Grocery shopping is a perfect time to teach your child about food and nutrition. Discuss where vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein foods come from. Encourage your children to help select healthy foods from the store.
2. **Cook together.** Provide opportunities for young children to help prepare meals and snacks. Cooking is a great way to spend time together. Here are some ideas for teaching valuable skills in the kitchen based on your child's age and ability:
 - **3 to 5 year-olds:** mix together simple ingredients, snap green beans, tear lettuce for a salad, press cookie cutters
 - **6 to 7 year-olds:** peel raw fruits and vegetables, shuck corn, use a vegetable peeler, crack eggs, measure ingredients
 - **8 to 9 year-olds:** use a can opener, juice citrus fruits, check the temperature of foods with a thermometer, beat eggs, pound chicken on a cutting board
 - **10 and older:** slice or chop vegetables, boil potatoes, microwave foods, bake foods in the oven, simmer ingredients on the stove

Start slow and give your child time to master each task.

Make family meals even more fun by letting your child choose nightly themes and menus. Or switch things up by taking it from the table to the floor – put a blanket on the ground to have an indoor picnic!

3. **Keep things positive.** Let your child see you enjoying new and healthy foods. Discourage your family members from making faces or negative comments about unfamiliar foods.
4. **Offer the same foods for everyone.** Avoid making different dishes to please children. Doing this teaches children they don't have to be willing to try unfamiliar foods. It's easier and less stressful to plan family meals where everyone eats the same thing. When introducing new foods include some family favorites alongside the new food.
5. **Set a good example for physical activity.** Let them see you be active. Make play time, family time. Walk, run, and play with your child rather than sitting on the sidelines.



Philly Steak Quesadilla

1 green pepper, thinly sliced
½ medium onion, thinly sliced
6 tablespoons shredded part-skim Mozzarella cheese
4 slices deli-sliced roast beef
2 low-fat 10-inch whole wheat tortillas
Cooking spray



1. Cook peppers and onion on medium heat in a non-stick skillet until onions tender, stirring occasionally. Remove from skillet.
2. Spray skillet with cooking spray. Add one tortilla. Sprinkle with 3 tablespoons cheese. Top with 4 slices beef. Add vegetables. Top with tortilla.
3. Cook on medium heat about 3 minutes. Use spatula to flip the quesadilla. Cook additional 3 minutes. Slide from skillet onto cutting board. Cut into 6 slices.

Pesto Tortellini

1 package frozen tricolor tortellini
2 medium summer squash
2 medium zucchini
¼ cup pesto
¼ cup shredded Parmesan and Romano cheese



1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cook tortellini according to package directions.
3. Wash and slice zucchini and other squash.
4. Toss vegetables, tortellini, and pesto together.
5. Place mixture in baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese.
6. Bake 20 minutes until cheese is melted.

Sources: Maryland Extension; <https://food.unl.edu/free-resources/newsletters/food-fun-young-children/be-healthy-role-model/>;
<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/illinois-nutrition-edition/2014-08-26-kid-friendly-recipes-kick-school-year> retrieved 04/02/25

Eat Smart Idaho can help you learn how to eat well for less. For information on Eat Smart Idaho classes, contact the Nutrition Instructor in your county:

Panhandle: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai & Shoshone Counties
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