

2 (Or More) Cooks Are Better Than 1!

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- Looking for a fun activity to do with friends?
- Seeking a new adventure with your spouse or date?
- Want to spend some quality time with a child or grandchild?

Try cooking together! Many people no longer cook because they're too busy with other activities. Make time to cook by making cooking "the activity."

To begin, there are two types of cooking situations. Here are some strategies for cooking together for each. Use one or more strategies as best fits your setting.

Situation 1: Working with Inexperienced Cooks

Strategy A. Give beginning cooks simpler-to-master tasks, such as chopping foods, arranging foods, etc.

Strategy B. Demonstrate how to do tasks before assigning them. Don't assume anything.

True story number one: A woman was helping another person make cookies. As she read "drop dough on cookie sheet," she heard a loud "clunk!" The other person - following directions to the letter - had dropped the bowl of dough on the cookie sheet!

Another true story, different people: A recipe called for "egg whites." Looking at the egg, this new cook saw the egg shell as the "white" part of the egg. The cake was rather crunchy!

Strategy C. Plan a menu with foods that can be prepared at different times. You'll be able to focus more on helping the beginning cook. For example, include a food that can be in the oven baking while the other foods are prepared.

Situation 2: Working With Experienced Cooks

Strategy A. Divide tasks in a recipe.

Strategy B. Prepare different recipes.

Here are some more tips to make your "cooking together" experience a success:

- Be tolerant of how the finished foods look. One person might cut the strawberries in a Yogurt Strawberry Parfait recipe into uniform slices. Another might just hack the berries into bits! Remember: they'll taste the same either way.
- Check the cupboards for ingredients and necessary cooking equipment before you begin cooking. Otherwise, you may need to abandon your recipes for reservations at the nearest restaurant.
- Serve snacks if you serve alcohol while cooking together. Alcoholic beverages, an empty stomach and kitchen knives aren't the best of companions.
- Include a back up food plan if cooking untested recipes at a party. Your main dish recipe may read better than it tastes. A pizza in the freezer could save the day.



Know how. Know now.

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- Supplement "cooked together" foods with "ready-to-eat" foods. Trying to make everything from scratch can put you in a "frantic" rather than "fun" mood. Example: no "rule" says you have to make rolls or bread from scratch. Buy a product that complements your menu and enjoy!
- Play some special music while you're cooking and eating together. Example: if you're experimenting with foods from a different country, listen to music from that country. This adds to the experience. Also, when people hear that music again, they'll remember the good times they had while cooking.

Here's a menu and sample recipes for a meal you might cook with friends or family. All recipes are for 4 people and are easy to adjust upward or downward for other numbers. Look to the end of this article for a recipe you might cook with a child or grandchild.

Menu & Timeline Tips for Cooking Together

Meal in a Potato
Spinach-Orange Salad
Whole Wheat Rolls (purchased)
Yogurt-Strawberry Parfait

Timeline:

1. Start potatoes baking before completing other menu steps.
2. Prepare salad next; refrigerate.
3. Slice strawberries, grate cheese for later; refrigerate.
4. Set table, start cleaning food preparation dishes.
5. Complete the potatoes. Set other foods on table.
6. Enjoy your meal!
7. Clean table, assemble dessert and complete your first meal of Cooking Together!

Meal in a Potato (4 servings, 1 potato each)

To make this recipe a true meal, add leftover meat, poultry, fish, or mashed beans, and vegetables like chopped spinach or broccoli to the potato.

- 4 large potatoes
 - 1 tablespoon oil
 - 4 tablespoons grated lowfat cheese (mozzarella or cheddar)
 - 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - 1/8 teaspoon pepper
 - 1/8 teaspoon nutmeg
 - Nonfat or lowfat sour cream or yogurt (optional)
1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Scrub potatoes well. Dry with a towel. Rub the outside with oil. Prick with a fork in several places. Bake about 45 minutes - 1 hour until potato is soft.

2. Cut off a cap lengthwise. Scoop out some of the pulp and mix with the cheese, salt, pepper and nutmeg. For a creamier filling, mix in nonfat or lowfat sour cream or yogurt until desired consistency is reached (about 1 to 2 tablespoons per potato or to taste). Spoon back into potato. Replace cap. Serve.

Per Serving: Calories: 262; Total fat: 4.1 grams; Saturated fat: 0.9 grams; Cholesterol: 1 milligram; Sodium: 204 milligrams

Source: adapted from Food, Family & Fun, USDA Food & Consumer Service Department.

Spinach-Orange Salad (4 servings, about 1 cup each)

- 4 cups spinach (torn-into-pieces)
 - 2 medium oranges, sectioned
 - 2/3 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
 - 1/2 cup sliced red onion (optional)
 - 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 - 2 tablespoons vinegar
 - 1/4 cup orange juice
 - 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
 - 1/4 teaspoon pepper
1. Place spinach in bowl. Add orange sections, mushrooms, and onion. Toss lightly to mix.
 2. Mix oil, vinegar, orange juice, ginger, and pepper well. Pour over spinach mixture. Toss to mix.
 3. Chill.

Per Serving: Calories: 110; Total fat: 7 grams; Saturated fat: 1 gram; Cholesterol: 0 milligrams; Sodium: 25 milligrams

Source: Using the Food Guide Pyramid: A Resource for Nutrition Educators, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture/Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services/Center For Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

Strawberry Yogurt Parfait (4 servings, about 1 cup each)

- 1 pint lowfat frozen vanilla yogurt
 - 2 cups sliced strawberries
 - 8 mint leaves (optional)
1. Layer yogurt and berries in parfait glass.
 2. Garnish with mint leaves and serve.

Note: For variety, use other berries or sliced fresh fruit in season.

Per Serving: Calories: 130; Total fat: 2 grams; Saturated fat: 1 gram; Cholesterol: 5 milligrams; Sodium: 60 milligrams

Source: Food, Family & Fun, USDA Food & Consumer Service Department.

Special Considerations for Cooking With Children

When first cooking with children, you may have more fun by choosing foods that don't have to be ready by a specific time. If everyone's hungry and waiting, there's a tendency to take over rather than give children time to learn.

For starters, make a simple snack together, such as this cookie recipe. Directions are included for tasks that children can help with. Calories and fat are lowered in this recipe by substituting applesauce for some of the fat.

New Oatmeal Raisin Cookies (Makes 30 cookies)

- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons margarine or butter
- 1 fresh large egg
- 2 tablespoons lowfat milk
- 1/4 cup canned applesauce
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1-1/4 cup quick oats
- 1/2 cup raisins

(IMPORTANT: When working with an electric mixer, children need to STOP the mixer when adding ingredients or scraping down the side of a bowl.)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Guide children in using an electric mixer on medium speed. Cream sugar and margarine or butter until smooth and creamy.
3. Ask child to slowly add egg. Mix on medium speed for 1 minute.
4. Child can slowly add milk and applesauce. Mix for 1 more minute. Scrape the sides of the bowl.
5. In a small bowl, help child combine together flour, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Add dry ingredients gradually to the creamed mixture and mix on low speed for 2 minutes, until blended.
6. Add oats and raisins and blend for 30 seconds on low speed. Scrape the sides of the bowl.
7. Child can portion dough by rounded teaspoons (about 2 inches apart) onto lightly greased cookie sheets.
8. Bake for 10 - 13 minutes until lightly browned. Cool on a wire rack.

Per Cookie: Calories: 70; Total fat: 1.3 grams; Saturated fat: 0.3 grams Cholesterol: 8 milligrams; Sodium: 42 milligrams

Source: Food, Family & Fun, USDA Food & Consumer Service Department.