

Food, Glorious, Food! Nutrition and Cooking for Kids Leaving Foster Care

Every cook has kitchen disasters and some have more than others. Whether you cook like a pro, or have trouble boiling water, know that cooking is a skill you can learn. Your cooking may not always be great, but good nutritious food is something you need and you can learn to turn out tasty, healthy meals.

Healthy foods

Candy and chips and soda taste great. A gigantic burger with super-sized fries and a soda is typically advertised at a lot of fast food restaurants, but a constant diet of fast food leads to being overweight, risking diabetes, and clogging your heart and arteries.

A good diet is based on:

- vegetables and fruit
- pasta, rice, bread and cereal, as much of it whole grain as possible
- protein sources such as eggs, beans, meat and nuts, and last,
- some fats and oils, and sweets occasionally, but not in large amounts.

Drink lots of fluids including water. Skip the sweetened soft drinks except as a treat. Plan treats for yourself, but not everyday, all day.



Think of eating healthy food as similar to an insurance policy. You have always wanted a safe secure life for

yourself. Eating healthy doesn't guarantee that you will never get sick, but eating good food can make your chances of being healthy and having

less pain and living longer a much better bet. *My Pyramid* is a government site that has great resources for nutrition, including menu planners, interactive tools, videos, and more. Check it out at <http://www.mypyramid.gov>



Food Resources

If you don't have money for food, know where organizations such as the Salvation Army offer free meals. You need regular good nourishment to keep your mind and body healthy.

Find out where the food pantries are in your area and how often you can use them. Pantries provide free groceries items for those who cannot afford them.

If you are pregnant or have a child, use the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program.

Now That You Have All Those Groceries, Let's Get Cooking.

You need some basic equipment, including:

- A larger pot and a frying pan
- A spatula and a big cooking spoon
- A sharp serrated (sawtoothed) blade knife
- One or two bigger mixing bowls
- Can opener

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- A toaster and a microwave
- Sponge or dishcloths and drying towels
- Cups, plates, bowls, silverware
- Dish soap

Try to find these items at a second-hand store like Goodwill, or go to garage sales. Don't forget to ask—foster parents, family, friends, and social workers. Many people are happy to help people get started. Start with the kitchen basics and add from there. Have fun.

What Can You Eat That You Don't Have to Cook or Heat?

- Peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Instead of jelly, add thin slices of banana, apples or raisins.
- Cereal and milk. Try non-sweetened kinds and add fruit.
- Sandwiches. You can put most anything in a sandwich and it can be great—lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, green pepper, cheese, olives, meat. Try whole grain bread for good nutrients.
- Salads. It can be some work when you are tired from a long day, but wash some lettuce and veggies and pile it on your plate. Buy some dressing and eat it with some bread. Make fruit salads too.

What Can you Cook That is Simple and Fast?

There are lots of ideas online, some of which have video demonstrations. You can also check out cookbooks at the library.

Cook easier recipes until you learn how to use your kitchen a little better. You will make mistakes. Everyone does. Your mom's fried chicken just might not be something you can make like

Twelve Shopping Tips

1. Plan your transportation. If you are taking the bus or walking, consider how much you can carry—you might have to make more frequent trips to the store.
2. Plan menus for the days until the next time you know you will shop.
3. Make a list of what you need.
4. Use coupons from the newspapers.
5. Pay attention to the cost of food items and get price savvy. Compare prices on everything. Store brands will be right next to name brands but will generally be much cheaper and the same quality.
6. Shop around the outside walls of supermarkets—this is where you find the veggies, fruit, dairy products, and bakery.
7. Buy processed foods sparingly. That's the food that is already cooked for you and you have to heat up. It is easy but it's not as healthy.
8. Canned vegetables are as nutritious as frozen or fresh.
9. Bring your own bags to the store if you can. Many stores give discounts for bring your own bag.
10. Get the supermarket special shopper cards which can save a lot.
11. Buy lunch food, beverages, and snacks that you can bring to work. It's usually much cheaper than eating out.
12. Go to sites like "Super Couponing" at <http://www.supercouponing.com/> for advice on how to get the best deals.

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she does when you first try. Let's hope you can laugh at your kitchen disasters and that they are not too expensive. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- The old basic, which is cheap and fast, ramen noodles. Add veggies and/or meat.
- Eggs are cheap, full of protein and easy.
- Rice and pasta cook quickly, which give you a filling basis for veggies, meat and sauces.
- Oatmeal and other hot cereals are good for you. Buy the big containers—even though it takes more time to cook, it tastes better and is much cheaper than the small packets.
- Wash a potato, poke it with a knife or fork and bake it at 350 for 45 minutes or in your microwave for about three minutes.
- Soups are filling and good to eat.

Wash dishes and wipe the table and counters after you eat. You will like your kitchen and your place better if it is clean. The more it collects, the harder it is to clean and to continue to cook.

Patience and Practice

Some of you are already pretty good cooks. Maybe it comes to you naturally or you learned from your relatives or foster parents. Lots of you won't be that confident in the kitchen. But either way, it is cheaper, more comforting, and fun to eat at home.

Be patient with yourself. You will learn. Maybe you can share meals and meal preparation with friends. Ask your relatives, foster family, and other adults in your life for suggestions and recipes. Soon you will be cookin'!



Books

Breaking Away, Teen Write About Leaving Foster Care: Stories of Independent Living. Youth Communication.

Do You Have What It Takes: A Comprehensive Guide to Success After Foster Care.

Edited by K. Hurley. Youth Communications

I Can Do It!, A Micropedia of Living on Your Own, by Marian B. Latzko

Recipes and Other Online Resources

www.kidsacookin.com This website is for parents of small kids but it has good recipes and some video demonstrations.

<http://www.spatulatta.com> This site is also for kids, but it has 350 step-by-step video recipes.

<http://www.reluctantgourmet.com/recipe.htm>

The recipes are pretty fancy but there are a lot of them and a lot of kitchen hints and ideas.

<http://www.freeallrecipes.com/> Free recipes.

<http://www.food.com/recipes/beginner-cook/healthy> Beginner cook recipes with both simple and fancy recipes and lot of how-to information.

<http://transition.fosterclub.com/?page=1> The New Transition Foster Club is a good general resource for information for kids aging out but not a source for recipes.

<http://allrecipes.com> At this site, you can put in your ingredients and it comes up with the recipes. Also has videos for basic cooking directions, like how to cook pasta noodles.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/> WIC, Women, Infants and Children government subsidy website.

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/> FoodShare helps people with limited money buy the food they need for good health.