Children usually love to help out in the kitchen. Even young children can assist with many different tasks. One of the best parts about cooking with children is that they are more likely to try foods they have helped prepare. The next time you are preparing a healthy meal, involve the kids by letting them help in the following ways.

**Two-year-olds can help with:**
- Cleaning vegetables and fruits
- Dipping foods
- Washing and ripping lettuce and other greens
- Tearing bread into smaller pieces
- Delivering shatterproof tableware to the table

**Three-year-olds can help with:**
- Spreading butters, jams, or other spreads onto foods
- Pouring liquids into batter (you measure first)
- Mixing batter, dips, or other dry and wet ingredients together
- Washing fruits and vegetables
- Hollowing out vegetables seeds or pits
- Kneading dough
- Serving foods
- Layering fruit and yogurt in parfaits
- Placing things in the trash, either after cooking or after a meal

**Four- and five-year-olds can help with:**
- Peeling certain vegetables and fruits, like onions or bananas
- Mashing soft fruits and vegetables
- Washing fruits and vegetables
- Cutting soft foods with a plastic knife (e.g. soft fruits and vegetables)
- Using cookie cutters
- Squeezing oranges, lemons, and limes to make juices
- Cracking open, breaking and pouring eggs
- Beating eggs with an egg beater
- Measuring dry ingredients
- Wiping up the cooking area
- Setting the table
- Clearing the table after a meal and delivering the dishes to the sink or dishwasher

*continued*
Even little ones can spend time in the kitchen while you are preparing food. Have an extra set of bowls and cooking utensils for infants and young toddlers to play with while you cook. Talk about what you are doing to teach them new vocabulary and allow them to smell and taste foods as appropriate.

Here are a few cooking activities to get you started:

- **Veggies and Fruit with Different Dips or Sauces** – Allow children to cut fruits and vegetables when possible and mix their own dips.

- **Layered Yogurt and Fruit Parfaits** – Allow children to create their own parfaits by layering the yogurt and fruit.

- **Garden “Roll-Ups”** – Use lettuce or tortillas as your wrap, and fill with the child’s choice of vegetables, sauces, herbs, etc.

- **Cucumber, Bell Pepper, or Summer Squash “Boats”** – Allow the children to hollow out their own vegetable and fill with cream cheese, herbs, other vegetables, etc. If you have access to an oven, you can take this recipe to another level and fill hollowed vegetables with rice, beans, cheese, etc. and bake at 375 degrees for 10-15 minutes or until tender. Make sure each child’s boat is identifiable as their own.

- **Fruit and Veggie Insects** – Make apple lady bugs by cutting a red apple in half, then sticking raisin “spots” on using cream cheese as the “glue.” Make cucumber caterpillars by slicing a cucumber in half lengthwise, then decorate with finely chopped vegetables, using dip or cream cheese as “glue.”