

# Cooking with the kids

Sophie Gray with tips for parents on teaching kids to cook, and some delicious, simple recipes to start with.

I don't remember learning to cook as a child. Helping in the kitchen was simply part of being a busy household with working parents.

These days it's a bit different with our busy lives and the proliferation of convenience foods.

## SO WHY BOTHER?

If each of my sister's four kids cooks dinner one night a week, her husband cooks one night and they have something snacky one night, then she only has to cook one night a week herself! That's fifty two evening meals per year instead of 365.

If we neglect to equip our kids with the means to nourish themselves then we must be prepared to cook all the meals 'till they leave home, having condemned them to a life of packaged and processed food.

I can't underestimate the importance of teaching our kids to cook. Cooking will sharpen their maths skills by using weights and measures, fractions, volume and geometry; they'll absorb science knowledge by working with liquids and gasses, acids and alkalies, temperature and timing; they'll improve their reading comprehension, logical thinking, planning, and eventually they may even clean up after themselves – though I'm not holding my breath.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

Getting kids beyond baking to producing a meal is a gradual process, but these tips will help you get underway.

### BASIC SKILLS AND TOOLS

- Chopping is an essential cooking skill. Children under 12 need close supervision and should be trained to keep their fingertips tucked under. Don't give them a blunt knife; sharp knives are much safer. If knives are too terrifying then teach them to use a processor (my kids do this; it chops the onions to a pulp but who cares as long as no bandaids are required!)

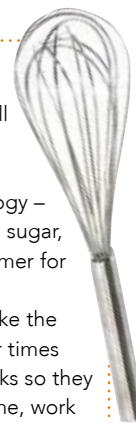
- Buy a "one-cup" measuring jug with cups and mls printed on the side, a set of labelled measuring spoons and several different coloured peelers- one for each child.
- Keep a green plastic scouring pad for the kids to use to scrub potatoes.
- Use a box or low stool so they are able to work at bench height.

### GETTING GOING

- Decide not to fuss about mess. It takes a lot of practice to cook, clean and tidy all at once. Concentrate on the

cooking part or they'll lose interest.

- Ensure they understand terminology – cream the butter and sugar, sauté till golden, simmer for 5 minutes, etc.
- Expect them to make the same recipe 3 or four times over a couple of weeks so they master it. The first time, work together, the second time just assist, the third time supervise but don't interfere, the fourth time let them try it unassisted. Eat it regardless of how it tastes...
- Be prepared to invest an hour or more to make dinner in the beginning. They will get faster as they gain confidence.
- Brag about them to everyone. "We had Elliot's' fantastic spaghetti with meatballs last night", etc. The praise will build confidence.
- Have the child do just the main dish; timing side dishes to be ready all at once takes a lot of practice.
- Keep the ingredients for their recipes in stock so they can offer to cook dinner without a drama.
- Don't allow them to confuse food assembly with cooking. Heating a hot dog and placing it in a bun is fine, but it's not cooking dinner and will not win them friends or influence people!



## Cowboy Casserole

Savoury main course kind of meals are the "make or break" of family mealtimes. Flavours need to appeal to a wide range of diners and processes often include chopping, frying and measuring, which all require a degree of accuracy to ensure success. Kids need to learn to master these skill as well, so simple main meals that cook quickly can help develop budding culinary talent while giving the main cook and bottle washer a night off.

**lean beef mince** 500g  
**onion** ½ chopped  
**baked beans** 2 cans  
**Worcestershire sauce** ½ tablespoon  
**beef stock powder** 1 teaspoon or a beef stock cube  
**cumin** ½ teaspoon  
**chilli powder** ¼ teaspoon  
**oregano** pinch  
**tomato paste** 1 heaped tablespoon  
**macaroni** 1 cup cooked and drained  
**cheese** 1 cup, grated

Preheat oven to 180°C.

Heat a medium-sized saucepan, add the meat and stir until browned. Add the onion and keep stirring until it softens. Mix in the two tins of baked beans, the spices, sauce and tomato paste and then sprinkle in the stock powder. Mix really well then add the cooked macaroni.

Pour the whole lot into an ovenproof casserole-type dish and cover with the grated cheese.



Heat in the oven till the cheese is melted and turning brown.

Serve with salad or veg and garlic bread.

**SERVES 4-6**

**Total cost of all ingredients:**

\$12.53 / per portion \$2.10

	per serve	%Day
Energy	1530kJ	18%
Protein	31.0g	47%
Fat	14.4g	20%
- saturated	6.7g	30%
Carbohydrates	28.4g	11%
- sugars	9.4g	15%
Fibre	8.7g	29%
Sodium	1110mg	48%
Calcium	180mg	20%
Iron	3.8mg	48%

## Savoury Pork en Croute

Pastry looks so appetising that the cook will bask in glory when they present the family with this dish. House brand ready-made pastry sheets cost around 75 cents each. You will need two for this dish. In culinary terms "en croute" just means wrapped in pastry. Use the leanest pork mince you can get, even if it means going to the butcher and paying a little extra. The recipe only uses a small amount, but the



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**SAVOURY PORK EN CROUTE**

**HIGH IRON**

- pork mince** 350g
- bacon** 50g, trimmed of fat and cut into small pieces
- onion** 1, chopped
- oil** ¼ teaspoon
- potato** 1 large, scrubbed and into cubes – the size of a dice
- apple** 1, peeled and grated
- bread** 2 slices, any kind, torn into pieces
- dried sage** 2 teaspoons
- Worcestershire sauce** 2 tablespoons
- frozen puff pastry** 2 sheets (use reduced-fat pastry sheets if you prefer)
- egg** 1, lightly beaten
- salt** ½ teaspoon

Preheat the oven to 210°C.

In a small pan, heat the oil, then add the chopped onion and potato and cook gently until onion is soft and

potato cubes are beginning to soften.

While the vegetables are cooking prepare the pastry by cutting a strip approximately 6 cm wide off one of the sheets of pastry. Set the strip aside to use for decorating.

Attach the remaining piece of pastry to the full pastry sheet by brushing a little water along one edge of the full sheet, overlap with the smaller sheet and press in place. Put the resulting rectangle on a lightly-greased baking sheet and roll the pastry gently with a rolling pin, increasing the width of the rectangle by about 1 cm.

Combine the pork mince, torn bread, bacon, sage, Worcestershire sauce,

grated apple and salt in a bowl. Add the cooked onion mixture and ¾ of the beaten egg (save the rest for brushing onto the pastry before cooking). Stir the mixture thoroughly and pile down the middle of the pastry rectangle patting and shaping to form a sausage, 1-2 cm shorter than the length of the pastry.

Brush along one side of the rectangle with water then wrap the pastry around the filling. Don't worry if the pastry only just wraps around. Flip the log over so the join is underneath and tuck the pastry under at each end to enclose the filling.

Cut diagonal slashes along the top with a sharp knife and then, using the reserved strip of pastry, cut 8 leaf shapes with a knife. Use a dab of water to stick the leaves in a pattern on the top. Brush the whole thing with remaining egg and bake in a preheated oven for 30 minutes or until pastry is dark golden and meat juices are clear.

Rest the log for 5 minutes before slicing and serve hot or cold.

**SERVES 6**

**Total cost of all ingredients:** \$7.04 / per portion \$1.18

	per serve	%Day
Energy	1050kJ	12%
Protein	19.3g	29%
Fat	11.1g	15%
- saturated	4.8g	22%
Carbohydrates	18.8g	7%
- sugars	4.5g	7%
Fibre	1.7g	6%
Sodium	680mg	30%
Calcium	40mg	4%
Iron	2.3mg	29%

# recipes

## Pasta with crumbled sausage and lemon

This recipe makes a small amount of good-quality sausage serve a whole family. You could use cream in place of lite evaporated milk if you prefer, or choose a spicy sausage variety such as Chorizo. The quality of the sausages is all-important. Don't attempt to do this with barbecue sausages or sizzlers.

**sausages** 3 good quality (I use Italian flavoured beef sausages)

**olive oil** ½ tablespoons

**garlic** 2 cloves, crushed  
**lemon** 1 big, grated zest of – the coloured part of the skin only

**parsley** 1 handful, chopped  
**lite evaporated milk** 1 can (375 mls)

**Papardelle or other fresh ribbon shaped pasta** for 4 people (400g)

Bring a large pot of water to the boil and cook the pasta according to the instructions.

Heat the oil in a shallow frying pan, chop one end off each of the sausages and squeeze the meat into the pan. Break the sausage meat up with a fork so it is in crumbly chunks. Add

the garlic and cook gently, stirring frequently to prevent the sausage from sticking and to crumble the meat as it cooks. When the meat is well browned, pour off any excess fat in the pan and add the evaporated milk. Simmer gently till reduced by a quarter, then add the lemon zest and parsley.

When the pasta is ready, drain and add to the sauce. Serve immediately.

**SERVES 4**

**Total cost of all ingredients:**  
\$11.23 / per portion \$2.81

## Linda's Chicken

	per serve	%Day
Energy	1170kJ	14%
Protein	36.7g	56%
Fat	10.8g	15%
- saturated	4.9g	22%
Carbohydrates	48.8g	18%
- sugars	0.1g	0%
Fibre	5.5g	18%
Sodium	625mg	27%
Calcium	320mg	36%
Iron	4.1mg	51%

**HFG TIP:** Have all the ingredients and equipment out on the bench before you start cooking and get the child to read through the recipe completely before you start.

## Couscous

If I am making this dish, I skin the drumsticks by gripping the skin with some kitchen towel and pulling it off like a stocking. I then drizzle the pan contents with a little olive oil, healthier than fat from chicken skin. My kids



can't yet manage to skin drumsticks so they cook them skin on and omit the oil.

- chicken drumsticks** 8
- onion** ½ chopped
- garlic** 3 cloves, crushed
- parsnip** 1
- potato** 1, cut in chunks
- swede or kumara** 1 small or use a chunk of pumpkin cubed
- carrots** 2 large, cut into chunky sticks a bit skinnier than a Jenga block
- frozen mixed veg** 1 cup
- dried thyme** 1 teaspoon
- chicken stock** 2 cups or 500 ml (use 1 ½ tsp stock powder per cup of water)
- couscous** 1 ½ cups
- olive oil** 2 tablespoon (optional)

Preheat oven to 180°C.

Place the drumsticks in a large roasting pan. Add the onions, garlic, thyme and the all vegetables except for the frozen ones; we'll add them later.

Bake for 20 minutes, stirring at least once, then pour in the stock and continue cooking for another 20 minutes.

Sprinkle in the frozen vegetables and couscous then give the contents of the pan a bit of a mix so the couscous comes in contact with the liquid and pan juices which it will absorb. Return to the oven for a further 10 minutes. Scrape all the nice crispy bits of couscous off the sides of the pan if you are serving it on a platter – we usually serve it straight



from the pan and fight over the crispy bits.

**SERVES 4**

**Total cost of all ingredients:**

\$13.82 / per portion \$3.46

	per serve	% Day
Energy	2435kJ	29%
Protein	41.0g	62%
Fat	22.6g	31%
- saturated	6.4g	29%
Carbohydrates	54.6g	21%
- sugars	7.5g	12%
Fibre	8.7g	29%
Sodium	450mg	20%
Calcium	100mg	11%
Iron	4.7mg	59%

**COOK'S TIP:** You can add more stock to the pan if it seems too dry before adding the couscous, a splash of wine can be included, different herbs such as rosemary or oregano can be used and this dish can be eaten hot or cold.

**HFG**



Sophie Gray is the face of Destitute Gourmet. She has published three best-selling books and regularly appears on television, radio and in magazines.

**All recipes tested by Caitlin Mehrtens, aged 12.**

"I tried all of these recipes, and they're really yummy. I was able to do everything myself; Mum just talked me through each step. It was lots of fun making real dinners instead of pre-packaged or heat-and-eat food. The Savoury Pork en Croute was definitely a crowd pleaser, and my favourite was the Cowboy Casserole. Even my semi-vegetarian Mum went back for seconds!"



Photography: Joanna Wickham Styling: Sally Travis