

Standard 9

Cooking

Provide resources and tips to help families prepare healthy and affordable meals at home.

Why is this Standard important?

Healthy eating can be a challenge for many families, and can be especially challenging for families that are on a tight budget. Meals prepared at home are often healthier and less expensive than eating out. Cooking together is also a great way for families to spend time together, for children to practice basic cooking skills and encourage healthy eating from a young age.

As a home visitor, you can help parents feel empowered to make healthy choices about the food they offer their families.

Help Families Learn Strategies to Prepare Healthy Meals at Home:

Some families may be unfamiliar with meal planning and cooking at home, while others may be looking for ways to add new, healthy foods into family meals. Share the following ideas with families for ways to maximize resources and add variety to mealtime.

Determine a Food Budget

- Include all income, WIC and SNAP benefits available for food purchases during the month.
- Families can divide the total by four for an estimate of available resources per week.

Make the Recipe Work for You

- Use food and leftovers on hand to plan meals.
- Include foods that are well-liked in addition to new foods.
- Look for sale items and what is in season.

Parents and caregivers can make substitutions based on what they have available. Swapping ingredients is a simple way to make a recipe when one of the suggested items is unavailable.

Soups/Stews: Try using different vegetables or meats. Add beans to the soup and make it meatless.

Casseroles: Different cheeses or shapes of pasta are an easy swap. Chopped vegetables add texture and important nutrients to a meal.

Salads: Almost anything can go in a salad. Mix up different kinds of beans, vegetables, chopped nuts or fruit for more variety.

Create a Food Experience

Home visitors can use fun activities to show parents and caregivers how to explore food with children.

Fruit and Vegetable Mystery Bag

Preparation: Place a whole fruit or vegetable in a brown paper bag (or a clean sock).

Activity: Have children feel the fruit in the bag (no peeking!) and describe what they perceive through touch. You can help facilitate the activity by asking questions:

- Does this food feel hard or soft?
- Does this food feel smooth or bumpy (or rough, scratchy, etc.)?
- Does this food feel warm or cool?
- Does this food feel wet or dry?
- Does this food feel bigger or smaller (than some other food)?

Bring the Kids into the Kitchen

Children enjoy helping and are more likely to try new foods when they have been involved in selecting and preparing them. Even little ones can participate in the fun!

Age	Tasks
2 and Under	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play with measuring spoons, cups, plastic containers or a whisk with a bowl of water
3-Year-Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rinse/scrub fruits and vegetables• Tear, snap or break foods• Pull grapes off the vine• Arrange food on a plate• Stir ingredients in a bowl
4-Year-Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measure ingredients• Cut with a plastic or dull butter knife• Squeeze juice from fruits• Shake small containers to mix ingredients
5-Year-Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help grate cheese and vegetables• Crack and beat eggs• Peel oranges
Children can also help: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set and clear the table• Clean up• Get ingredients and put supplies away	