

Healthy Kitchen,

Expert Tips and Tricks on Nutrition, Kitchen Organization, and Cooking for the Whole Family

HAPPY PARENT

By Isabelle Krishana and Jessie Saunders



Isabelle Krishana and Jessie Saunders, with Isabelle's daughter, Maya.

Have you admitted defeat in the great battle of dinnertime? Despite your best efforts and intentions, are you dishing up (non-organic) chicken nuggets every night? Or maybe Annie's mac and cheese is your poison?

It doesn't have to be like this! Starting with the first solid foods a child eats, there are a few simple steps and rules that can dramatically change your life, putting you in charge of your kids' meals.

The simplest way to teach these skills is not through a Baby Batali video (though that would be pretty fun), but by actually sitting down at the table and eating with your kids. When your child starts eating solid food, make sure to sit down at the table together at least twice a day and share the same food at the same time. Sweet potatoes, bananas, avocados, and applesauce are great choices for the younger set, and are all really delicious (and healthy) for parents too. A shared meal is a great way to bond with your kids, and it also shows them from the get-go that your sole purpose is not to cater to their every whim, but rather that they are part of a family that does things together.

The biggest mistake that we see people make with young children is preparing separate meals for their children on a regular basis. Let's face it: sometimes you want to make or order something just for yourself and not worry about whether the kids will like it, and that's fine. But as a rule, there should be one meal for all members of the family. If kids are used to eating the same foods as the rest of the family, they will have no idea that kids the world over are getting special meals of dinosaur-shaped nuggets and fries for dinner. They will instead eat grilled salmon and roasted cauliflower, usually without complaint. Modeling appropriate behavior is one of the most important predictors for a

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child's behavior—remember that your actions, not only your words, strongly influence your child's behavior. This includes, dear parents, fessing up to your own food prejudices and phobias and making a concerted effort not to pass them along to the next generation.

Make sure that your expectations for mealtime behavior are age appropriate and concise. These “values” depend on what's important to you, but some tips that we've used over and over with great success are: (1) Kids have to take as many bites as their age in years. Therefore, a 2-year-old has to take at least two bites of everything that you've prepared. (2) Kids have to sit at the table while the family eats, whether they like the meal or not. They can have a book if they like, but they should learn from an early age that the family sits together. (3) Kids love having ownership over anything and everything, so put even the youngest kids “in charge” of something having to do with your meals, whether picking out apples or browsing through picture cookbooks for a recipe.

In order to give yourself a chance to make this dream a reality, you need to be comfortable and confident in your kitchen—and this is a nirvana-like state we rarely see. Usually, people who hate being in their kitchen fall into one of two categories. The first comprises those who have so much stuff that removing a frying pan or a mixing bowl from the cabinet without precise, Tetris-like maneuvers risks an avalanche of never-used cookware. These items usually landed in one cabinet or another the day that they moved in and have never seen the light of day since.

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The other unhappy client suffers from not having enough stuff. When they turn on the stove to make even the simplest things—a scrambled egg, say—the inadequate and sometimes broken kitchen tools never seem to do the job.

The common thread between these two sorts of kitchen-challenged folks is the dread at facing their cooking reality—the prospect of reorganizing, sorting through, and trying to pinpoint what should be where seems exhausting. So it never happens, and the Chinese takeout remains on speed-dial.

In our consultations, we always tell our clients, “Your kitchen is your office.” The best sort of office is arranged for ease of use and practicality. Like your office, your kitchen is a place to work. Your goal should be to work in as tight a space as possible and have everything you use on a daily basis within easy reach. Make sure that your plates and glasses

FIVE FOOLPROOF KITCHEN TOOLS

You've got your pots and pans and knives. But what else do you need to round out your kitchen?

RICE COOKER

This (very) cheap piece of equipment, usually \$25 or less (try the Sanyo for \$21.95 at pearlriver.com), is the ultimate in one-pot cooking. If you're squeezed for time, throw in some rice, tofu, and a few chopped veggies. Instant meal.

MICROPLANE ZESTER

This long, slim metal grater is great for Parmesan, lemon zest, and even garlic, as it's much easier to clean than a garlic press. The best one is made by Microplane (\$8.55 at amazon.com).

LOCKING TONGS

There are many tongs on the market, but the only ones worth buying and keeping are the sort that are spring-loaded and have a locking mechanism to keep them closed. We swear by the sturdy tongs made by Oxo.

LE CREUSET DUTCH OVEN

Though we rarely recommend big-ticket items, this is a pot we swear by. Practically indestructible, it goes from stovetop to oven, and for slow-cooked items like braises or stews, it is the best you can buy. Nothing is going to burn in a Le Creuset. A five-quart Le Creuset is \$189.95 at zabars.com.

KITCHEN SCISSORS

Like tongs, kitchen scissors have any number of uses, from snipping parsley or basil, to cutting chicken breasts or sectioning sausages. We like Oxo or Henkels kitchen shears.

—I.K and J.S

are in the cabinets closest to your dishwasher. Cull your pots and pans so that getting the ones you use the most are easy to pull out. Go through your drawers and throw out anything that is broken or past its prime. Sharpen your knives. Keep a jar of wooden spoons, a spatula, and tongs by the stove, along with a small bowl of salt and your pepper grinder. Make a list of things you might need to add or replace, and sit down and order them—we find that Zabars.com has a wide selection and good prices.

But there's still one kitchen demon lurking: the cooking itself. There's nothing more dispiriting than spending time at the stove, diligently following a recipe, only to have the results spurned immediately by the kids—and yourself. Many people who hate to cook hate it because what they make never lives up to what they imagined it would taste like. But the kind of cooking skills you need to make tasty meals for your children on an average Tuesday night are not scary, and they're easily learned. (In fact, we'll start you out with two cooking truths: remember to use enough salt, and remember to use enough heat under your pan. Salt, of course, helps with flavor, and high heat helps create delicious crispiness.) It might seem daunting, but it's worth it to get over any cooking phobias for a happier, healthier dinnertime. 🌸

Isabelle Krishana and Jessie Saunders are the founders of Kitchen Cabinet, a personalized cooking program to help people learn how to create easy, tasty, and healthy meals for their families using mostly local and organic ingredients. Contact Isabelle Krishana at Kitchen Cabinet, www.kitchencabinetny.com, 212-222-5942, info@kitchencabinetny.com.

Demystifying Organic Shopping

By Jessica Ciosek



Practical Tips For Your Next Trip To The Grocery Store

With supermarkets like Whole Foods springing up in neighborhoods around the city and the influx of organic goods at even the most unassuming corner bodegas, not to mention the farmers' markets and CSAs (Community-Supported Agriculture programs) with convenient pickup locations, shopping organic has never been easier. But just how essential is it?

"When it comes to food products, organic means grown without synthetic chemicals and pesticides and not genetically modified," says Alexandra Zissu, author of "The Complete Organic Pregnancy." She adds, "Buying organic foods keeps these chemicals and pesticides out of you and your family, away from the farmers, and out of the earth."

According to Zissu, buying organic is especially important when shopping for meat and dairy products. Meat not labeled as such comes from animals that are often treated with hormones and eat non-organic feed, which leads to greater concentrations of chemicals and pesticides in their flesh—which we in turn ingest into our own bodies.

When it comes to produce, however, some fruits and vegetables are easier for pesticides to leach into, whereas others are less likely to retain pesticide exposure. The Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) posts the following

recommendations when shopping for fruits and vegetables:

OK to buy conventionally farmed	Definitely worth paying more for organic
Peaches	Onions
Apples	Avocados
Sweet Bell Peppers	Sweet corn (frozen)
Celery	Pineapples
Nectarines	Mango
Strawberries	Sweet Peas (frozen)
Cherries	Asparagus
Lettuce	Kiwi
Grapes (imported)	Bananas
Pears	Cabbage
Spinach	Broccoli
Potatoes	Eggplant

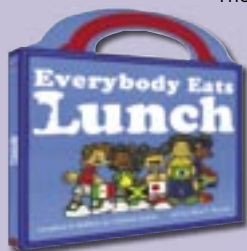
Zissu stresses that when shopping in a supermarket, keep an eye out for the USDA organic seal because you can rely on it as a trustworthy source for products grown and processed organically. But remember, "Just because it says organic does not mean it is nutritionally viable," says Zissu. Packaged foods like cookies and chips can be certified organic but still not be the healthiest food choices for you and your family. ☒

plate dates

A Roundup of Kid-Friendly Cookbooks

Kitchen Playdates, by Lauren Bank Deen

From "Confetti Spaghetti" to "Spice-Treasure Playdate," 70 innovative recipes that parents and kids can try together. Kids of all ages will enjoy the ideas for creative cooking projects and jobs that keep everyone active in the kitchen, while the simple ingredients required for each recipe make parents' jobs easy.



Everybody Eats Lunch, by Cricket Azima

Kids take part in a doubly educational experience as they learn to maintain a healthy diet and develop an international palate.

The lunchbox-shaped book takes kids on a journey inside the lunchboxes of youngsters from Japan to Jamaica as they lift up removable pictures of food to find the unique recipes underneath and learn how to say "lunch" in different languages.

The Toddler Cookbook, by Annabel Karmel

Even preschoolers can play the role of chef as they help Mom and Dad prepare a delicious assortment of fun, funky recipes. The array of delicacies includes treats like little pita pizzas, chicken dippers, and peanut butter bears, complete with colorful photographs and comprehensive steps.

Spatulatta Cookbook, by Isabella Gerasole and Olivia Gerasole

From the preteen hosts of spatulatta.com comes an eclectic collection of recipes that encourages kids to explore the joys of cooking. The recipes, including "Bunny Salad" and "Papa's Pesto," are organized by season, and even feature ideas for simple snacks and vegetarian cuisine.

Yum-O!: The Family Cookbook, by Rachael Ray

Based on Rachael Ray's non-profit organization that raises money to feed the hungry, "Yum-O!" gets parents and kids working together to create a healthier, well-balanced diet. The cookbook shows kids ways to help out in the cooking process and how the whole family can eat healthy with simple, low-budget recipes.

—Shana Lebowitz