

Why cook at home?

Contrary to popular belief, a family in which everyone takes a hand in cooking at home is going to enjoy better broth as well as better food and drink in general, and very much better health, than a family who thinks a healthy meal is a fast-food beefburger with sugar-free ketchup.

In general, food prepared at home with fresh ingredients contains more vitamins and less sugar, salt and other chemical additives than food prepared in a factory or fast-food outlet. Home-cooked food can be prepared with less polyunsaturated fat, thereby reducing the harmful inflammation produced by oxidized free radicals and providing a healthier proportion of omega-3 fatty acids. It can be prepared with free-range eggs and organic milk, which contain much more omega-3 than food from hens and cows whose diet is dependent on cereals, and which are free from possible antibiotics and growth hormones. Bread and pastries baked at home from organic flour will be free from the potentially harmful chemical additives in commercial flour, while vegetables grown at home or by small market gardeners will have higher vitamin contents than those grown on large-scale enterprises where successive crops have depleted the nutritional content of the soil.

Home-cooked food is therefore healthier than commercially prepared food, and is less likely to produce diabetes, arteriosclerosis and the many other physical problems discussed earlier in this book. So for your own sake, as well as your children's, prepare as much food as you can at home.

There is a second, equally important, reason for cooking at home, and it is this. It is the only way you can teach your children to cook. They are unlikely to learn to cook at school, so teaching them to cook at home is really important. Why? Because it:

- builds family relationships, by providing an enjoyable and useful activity in which you and your children can engage together, whatever their age
- provides unparalleled opportunities to teach them about healthy and unhealthy diets and to supply them with convincing reasons for choosing only healthy food and drink
- builds self-confidence, giving your children opportunities to feel proud of doing something well
- encourages creativity
- introduces them to new foods and helps to overcome fussy eating, as children will generally eat something they have prepared themselves
- equips them to take over some of the food preparation fully when they are older, eventually saving you time and effort
- gives them confidence in adult life to entertain guests and practise hospitality
- makes them more eligible life partners

On the last point, what impressed my future wife and perhaps persuaded her to start going out with me was my cooking an omelette for her over a gas ring in my room at university!

Children today face enormous pressures to consume too much unhealthy food and drink. These pressures come from:

- advertisers (when did you last see a TV advertisement for broccoli or fresh fish before a children's TV programme?)

- having enough pocket money or school dinner money to buy things like sweets, crisps, chips and beefburgers
- peer pressure not to eat uncool foods like lettuce and bean sprouts
- bad family eating habits that start from a young age

Teaching your children to prepare and cook good food from their early years will give you opportunities to talk about the differences between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ food and drink, to teach them the importance of eating food from the different nutrition groups (see Annexe 3), and to encourage them to try out foods with which they are not yet familiar. These are all invaluable items in their armoury against the sticks of rock and stones of potatoes that are continually hurled at them by Giant Obesity and the Sugar Plum Duff Fairy.

I don't have time

Employment seems to leave little time to learn or practise home cookery, and the availability of ready meals and takeaways can make it all seem like unnecessary hard work. But finding