



Increasing Sensory Awareness through Food

Article written by Pat Jones, MS (pjones4@unl.edu)
Extension Educator in Northeast Nebraska

A simple but powerful experience for families is enjoying a meal together. At the table, begins our first experience with solid foods; we squish it, push it, smear it, lick it, smell it and taste it. The kitchen table begins the journey of sensory learning. Cooking engages the five senses through hands-on experiences: seeing, touching, hearing, smelling and tasting.

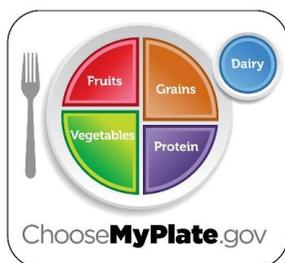
Seeing: As we prepare foods, children can look at foods to describe color, shape, and size. After food is prepared, talk through how items such as color, shape, and size have changed. For example: A whole fresh pineapple is bumpy; green, yellow or somewhere in between with big with green spikes coming out of the top. After a pineapple is prepared it is yellow and round.

Touching: Many foods we eat have different textures. Describing the textures of food before and after it is prepared is a great activity with kids. Some examples of ways foods can be described as smooth, scratchy, bumpy, sandy, soft, or hard.

Hearing: As food is prepared, children can identify the many different sounds that can be heard. When celery is cut, it makes a crunching sound. When you eat cereal it makes a crackle sound. Tossing lettuce makes a rustle sound and hamburgers sizzle when cooked on the stove or grill.

Smelling: Mouthwatering smells can be as enjoyable as taste. Foods can smell sweet like an orange, sour like a lemon, savory like fried chicken, or spicy like salsa. Helping children describe the smells of food will also increase the pleasure of tasting foods, because we taste a large percentage of food through smell.

Tasting: Beyond the sight, sound, touch, and smell of food, there is the ultimate taste. Bringing all of the senses together through eating the food. Helping kids describe how food tastes: sour like a lemon, sweet like candy, buttery like a biscuit, spicy like peppers, zesty like a tomato, or salty like a potato chip.



Putting it all together in a meal. With your child's help, enjoy the journey of meal preparation from start to finish. Start with smooth and creamy macaroni & cheese and add hamburger sliders for chewy texture and savory flavor. To include vegetables in our meal - a salad of sweet tomatoes, ruffled green lettuce, crunchy carrots and sweet raisins. End by creating a fruit salad with different colors and textures. Examples of

fruits that would work well together include, watermelon, grapes (cut in half), bananas, and pineapple. This will bring the senses to a complete circle. Time spent learning with kids is priceless and full of flavor.



Creamy, Crunchy, Crispy Fruit Cup

- Yogurt, frozen yogurt or pudding
 - Waffle bowl, waffle cone or ice cream cone
 - Fresh, canned or frozen (thawed) fruit
1. Place yogurt or pudding in the bottom of your waffle bowl.
 2. Top with fruit. Enjoy!

Additional idea: Sprinkle toppings such as granola, dry cereal, crushed graham crackers or finely chopped nuts.

Sources:

1. Cooking and Learning with Young Children, Community Coordinated Child Care, Inc.: <http://bit.ly/2adNiva>
2. Savory Sensory Learning, PennState Extension: <http://bit.ly/2arFy9M>