



Increasing Sensory Awareness through Food

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 food, 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 green spikes coming out of the top. After a pineapple is prepared it is yellow and round.

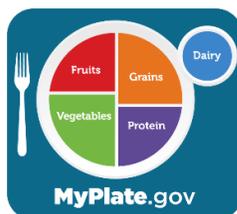
Touching: The food we eat has different textures. Describing the textures of food before and after it is prepared is a great activity with kids. Examples of ways foods can be described as smooth, scratchy, bumpy, sandy, soft, or hard.

Hearing: As food is prepared, children can identify the different sounds that can be heard. When celery is cut, it makes a crunching sound. When you eat cereal, it makes a crackling sound.

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

Tasting: Beyond the sight, sound, touch, and smell of food, there is the ultimate taste. Bringing all the senses together through eating the food. Helping kids describe how food tastes: sour like a lemon, sweet like candy, buttery like a biscuit, 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 - a salad of sweet tomatoes, ruffled green lettuce, and crunchy carrots. End by creating a fruit salad with assorted colors and textures. 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

- 1 mini-waffle bowl
 - ¼ cup low-fat yogurt
 - ¼ cup fresh, canned, or frozen (thawed) fruit
1. Wash hands with soap and water. Place yogurt or pudding in the bottom of your waffle bowl.
 2. Top with fruit. Enjoy!
Makes 1 serving
containing 120 calories, 1g fat, 23g carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 14g sugar, 4g protein.

Additional ideas: Try using frozen yogurt or pudding instead of yogurt. Sprinkle on 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.
2. Savory Sensory Learning, Penn State Extension:
<https://bit.ly/3UzNUOM>