



## Food fun for young children

### Learning about food

Children like to help prepare family meals and snacks. Preparing food is an important skill and a great opportunity to learn to make healthy choices.

Children can get satisfaction from eating food they have prepared themselves and are more likely to try different foods. There's always some task they can tackle – fetching, measuring, washing fruit and vegetables, tearing lettuce. Very young children can dip food and break bread into pieces.

Children pick up lots of ideas and skills when they cook with you.

- They learn to use cooking tools and techniques – encourage them to help
- They learn about foods for different meals and occasions – talk about the choices you make
- They can also learn about foods and drinks that keep our bodies healthy.

### Involve your children in making healthy food choices

Let children choose between two healthy foods.

“Shall we have rice or potatoes?”

“Would you like broccoli or cabbage?”

“Do you want peanut butter or cheese sandwiches?”

### Encourage healthy habits

Here are some habits that are important for everyone's health:

- wash hands first
- use clean utensils
- keep work surfaces clean
- clean up afterwards.

### Focus on the senses

Children learn about new foods through their senses. So it's important for children to be offered a variety of healthy foods and drinks.

Take an orange...

- Look – titiro – at the colour, shape and size.
- Feel – whakapa atu – the peel, pith, skin and flesh of the segments, and juice. Ask them to describe what it feels like.
- Smell – hongia – mmmm! the juice, zest and skin.
- Listen – whakarongo – to the sounds as it is peeled and segmented, as it is rolled on the table, as it touches another orange, as you tap on its surface.
- Taste – ngaoa – is it sweet or sour? What are the differences between the juice, flesh, peel?

## I can help too!

Helping one another is part of being a family. When children want to be involved, listen to their ideas and think about what they can contribute. Remember to consider safety and supervision.

For example, to make a sandwich for lunch, could your child:

- collect ingredients or utensils?
- put spreads on bread?
- choose a healthy filling?
- grate cheese and cut up tomatoes?
- layer the sandwich?
- safely cut the sandwich into portions?

## Grow your own food

Children can grow healthy foods to eat and enjoy. Watch, water and weed while you wait!

- Grow bean or alfalfa sprouts in a jar on a windowsill. Children won't lose interest because they grow fast. Eat them in salads and sandwiches.
- Grow herbs like parsley and chives in pots. You will have herbs ready to use when you are cooking together.
- Grow vegetables like radishes, carrots, cherry tomatoes, peas and dwarf beans.
- Strawberries can be grown in a pot.
- Sunflowers are spectacular to grow and the seeds are delicious to crunch on.

## More ideas

- Check out your local library for stories and information about healthy foods and foods from different cultures.
- Look on the Internet for new recipes to try.
- Create a 'Healthy foods' poster together.
- Involve children in the preparation and sharing of food for a special celebration.

They may enjoy helping to:

- set out food (e.g., sandwiches, pieces of fruit) on plates
- pass around food and serviettes to guests
- scrub vegetables for the hangi
- set the table.

Children learn that their contribution is valued.

Many of these ideas will fit into your everyday routines. Others will need a little more preparation. Over time, children will learn about the many reasons for eating healthy food.

