

## COOKING WITH CHEF LIA

## The ABC's of Healthy Eating

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It's back-to-school time again and people are rushing around trying to find just the right school supplies and the "oh-so-in" fashion and accessories. This year, we should also put healthy food supplies on the

list. Extra activities in addition to the endless workday makes it easy to opt for fast food solutions, which typically don't include many healthy food ingredients. If we just get as organized with our meals as we do with getting ready for school, we can succeed in eating even a little bit healthier.

This is also a great time of year when families can take advantage of teachable moments that can arise when trying to encourage healthy eating habits. Our habits are formed early in life. If we make a concerted effort to guide our families in the right direction throughout the year, we can affect a real change in their attitude toward healthy food choices. Children, especially, should be included in the decision-making process of what they eat. When this happens, they learn by doing. It becomes second nature to pick fruit over those potato chips if they just get used to doing it more often and it's their choice. Children can also become empowered to eat better when they are included in the food preparation process, where possible, so that they learn what it means to put a healthy meal together.

Success in healthy eating habits takes some basic education, careful thought and some planning just like any other subject we study. To begin to learn the ABC's of healthy eating it helps to understand what our daily nutritional requirements should be. Having this basic knowledge helps us to decide what foods we should be eating to give us the energy to succeed in our studies and other activities.

### About The New Dietary Guidelines

By now you might know that the government has released new dietary guidelines for adults and children. The new food pyramid is a much better guide than previous versions. Children should be eating 4 to 6 servings of fruits and vegetables, at least 3 servings of healthy carbohydrates (like whole grains), and 2 to 3 cups of fat-free or low-fat dairy products a day. Total fat should not

exceed 35 percent of calories. And we should always try to minimize the intake of junk foods.

For more detailed information on recommended dietary requirements, visit the USDA website at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) where you can enter in your data to get a specific pyramid plan for you.

### Be Creative in Adding Healthy Food Choices to Your Diet

We are definitely not going to change our family's eating habits overnight, but we should at least try to add some healthy food choices to our current diet in small steps. For example, if your children absolutely love those horrible, pre-packaged lunch boxes from the supermarket, you can create a much healthier version and get the kids involved in making their lunch as an activity. Simply purchase some plastic containers with dividers that separate the food items. Put out a selection of healthy food choices and let your child pick what to put in each section.

When my daughter was young she used to get a kick out of our "homemade lunch-able." The main section was usually the protein choice. There you would find wholegrain crackers with cheese and low-fat turkey or ham. She loved building the sandwiches at lunch. The other sections were for the fruit/vegetable selection. And a healthy snack option such as a homemade mix of pretzels and peanuts or a trail mix blend. Many times I would fill a small Thermos (remember those?) with healthy soups and leftovers from the night before. Soup, I have found, is an unbelievably easy way to add vegetables to your child's diet. For some reason if they are camouflaged in the soup base, they taste better! Add some low-fat string cheese and crackers and you have a much healthier lunch option.

Getting your kids to adjust their taste buds toward simple, unprocessed foods can help them develop healthier choices as they become adults and could help ward off early obesity. Just the other day, I heard a great tip about putting together a list of lunch foods on index cards. Your child can then design their own lunch menu by mixing and matching the cards. Herein, they will learn what healthy food choices they have and in addition, get some extra reading and writing practice! To add to this idea, for younger children, pictures of the various foods make them great flash cards to learn from. This is just one example of a "teachable moment" in food preparation.

### Create a Family List of Favorite Foods (and then find ways healthier ways to prepare them)

When I worked full-time we ate our fair share of takeout foods. As a result, both my husband and daughter had very high cholesterol levels. After I left corporate America to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a personal chef, I decided the easiest way to transition my family into healthier eating was to rely on their favorite food choices. For example, my family could eat pasta and pizza every day of the week! This really isn't a problem anymore, though, because I make my own pizza crust using whole grains and my sauce is fortified with various vegetables (which are ground down to hide them). The cheese toppings are also low-fat versions. I can honestly say that they don't really like pizzaria pizza anymore. They really have adjusted to my homemade variety. And it's really fun to come up with new and healthy topping ideas.

If I make pasta, again my sauce is fortified with hidden healthy ingredients or I vary the style of pasta we have, such as a stir-fry with lots of vegetables and chicken over spaghetti for an oriental variety.

Any time of the year is great to start learning how to eat better and make healthier food choices. But the back-to-school season is a great time to get your kids involved in learning how to create healthy meal choices and to cut back on some of the unhealthy school lunch offerings. In addition, if we learn how to organize our meal planning and include our families in the process, we can also create healthy dinners and rely less on fast foods.

### ...Special E-book For "Cooking With Chef Lia" Readers:

I have created a special booklet of family-friendly recipe ideas that I have collected throughout the years. Many of which are kid-tested and approved. I have also included a list of online recipe resources. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please visit my website ([www.ChefLia.com](http://www.ChefLia.com)) and fill out a contact request form. In the "Comments" section, just let me know you would like the booklet and I will e-mail a copy to you.

*Chef Lia Soscia is a personal chef and owner of Home Cooking Consultant Personal Chef Services located in Nassau County on Long Island. She has been cooking for 30 years for friends and family. Lia's Personal Chef Services include home meal preparation, cooking lessons & parties and more.*

If you have any cooking questions, please visit Chef Lia at [www.ChefLia.com](http://www.ChefLia.com) or write Lia@ChefLia.com. She looks forward to hearing your comments and questions. And continue to check back for more "Cooking With Chef Lia," only in Greenlight Long Island Magazine.