

The Kids Cook Monday™ Program Can Help Reduce Child Obesity

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Childhood obesity is a major population health problem in the United States. One in five teens aged 12-19 are obese.¹ As described in a [recent brief](#), obesity is tied to a host of health issues, such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, low immune function, and inflammation. Childhood obesity and accompanying health problems like type 2 diabetes are on the rise, which threatens the health and longevity of future generations.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically increased the use of takeout and delivery, with two thirds of American consumers stating a food delivery platform like Door Dash is now their preferred way to eat dinner.¹ However, rates of takeout and delivery have been increasing steadily since 2012³—well before the COVID-19 pandemic. High body mass index (BMI) is linked to the frequency of eating food prepared outside of the home, suggesting that both individuals and families who routinely order takeout have a greater chance of becoming overweight or obese.¹ There's a reason why food delivery services are so common: the demand is there. With multiple apps and options to have food and groceries delivered right to your door, takeout and delivery feeds our nation's desire for instant gratification. Paired with our increased busyness, it's no wonder these services have gained strong popularity in the U.S. But what if families could spend more time in the kitchen cooking their own food?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Childhood obesity is a major U.S. population health problem.
- Participating in cooking family meals can serve as a protective factor against obesity and risky behaviors in children.
- Kids Cook Monday is a Healthy Monday program which provides support for families to regularly cook meals together.

Get Your Kids in The Kitchen

Cooking can improve your relationship with food and increase healthy food consumption, especially among youth. Regular family meals can increase children's intake of fruits and vegetables and decrease intake of high-calorie and low-nutrient-dense foods.⁴

Getting kids involved in meal preparation at a young age helps them develop a taste for whole and nutritious foods instead of processed foods, and this preference can combat obesity.⁵ Children's cooking and nutrition programs have been shown to:

- Increase children's preferences for fruits and vegetables,
- Build self-efficacy and comfort with cooking and making food choices, and
- Increase knowledge and communication about healthy eating.^{4,6,7}

Children feel a sense of ownership and accomplishment when they help prepare meals. This sense of pride boosts their confidence and increases their chances of eating the healthy meal they created.⁵ This reinforces children’s cooking ability, which is linked to better nutrition, improved mental health, and stronger family connections.⁶

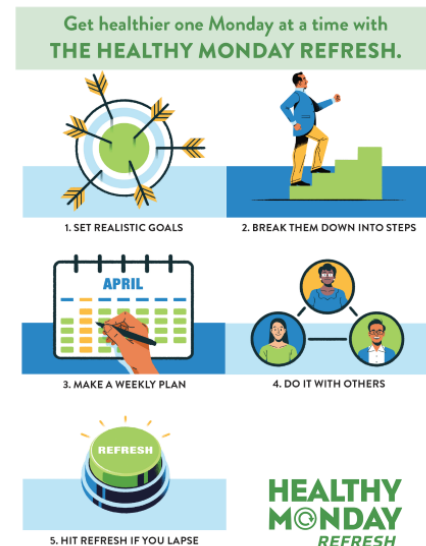
With all the benefits that come with family cooking, it is important to consider how families can easily integrate home cooking into their routine.

How Kids Cook Monday™ Can Help

Healthy Monday is a signature program of the Syracuse University Lerner Center and is a national public health initiative from The Monday Campaigns. Its aim is to prevent chronic disease by offering individuals and organizations a weekly prompt to start and sustain healthy behaviors.

The bedrock of Healthy Monday is the ‘Monday Refresh’, a unique way to recommit to your health intentions by starting each week with a healthy behavior.⁸

Kids Cook Monday is a Healthy Monday program that “encourages families to set aside the first night of every week to establish a routine of making healthy food choices by cooking and eating together.”⁵ This program provides the foundation for families to connect with each other and with the food they eat, which can protect against more than just childhood obesity.



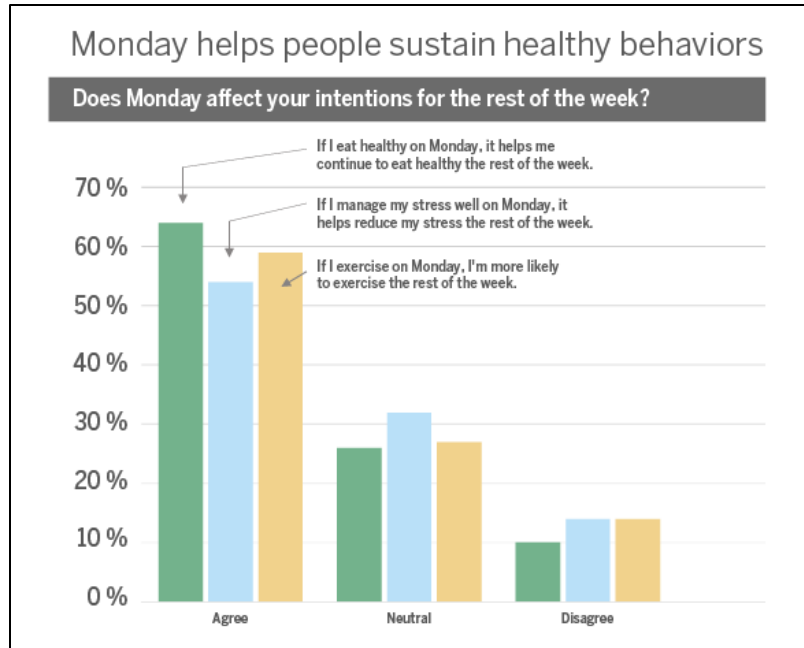
Parents involved in the program report decreased high-risk behaviors in their children, including:

- Trouble in school,
- Substance use,
- Violence,
- Binge eating/purging,
- And more.^{6,9,10}

Want to Cook as a Family? Start on Monday

Why Monday? Research shows that people view Monday as a day for a fresh start, and they are more likely to start diet and exercise programs, attempt to manage stress, and schedule doctor’s appointments on Monday than any other day. Starting on Monday helps you carry out your healthy intentions for the week.

By intentionally cooking a meal as a family on Mondays, you can reinforce a positive relationship with food and set the stage for healthier eating in the home all week long. The best part is that Monday is always around the corner, giving you a chance to try Kids Cook Monday every week.¹¹



Source: The Monday Campaigns, 2021

Tips for Cooking with Kids

Caregivers who want to include children in the kitchen should first familiarize themselves with which tasks are suitable for the ages of the children. Guidance from Kids Cook Monday on [kitchen tasks for different age groups](#) is listed below.

2-3 years old:

- Squeezing lemons or limes
- Washing and drying produce
- Picking fresh herb leaves off of stems and ripping them into small pieces
- Tearing up lettuce
- Sprinkling dried herbs
- Using a pepper grinder
- Kneading dough
- Brushing (or “painting”) oil
- Using the rolling pin
- Stirring
- Mashing

4-5 years old:

Motor skills and independence differs at this age. Some kids will continue doing the 2-3-year-old tasks, and others could try the 6-7-year-old tasks.

6-7 years old:

- Using measuring spoons
- Dicing and mincing vegetables

- Grating cheese
- Peeling raw fruits and vegetables
- Greasing pans
- Draining and slicing tofu (note: tofu is easier to slice than other proteins, like beef or chicken)
- Rinsing grains and beans
- Forming cookies and patties
- Pouring liquids into small containers

7-8 years old:

There is a wide range of skills in this age group. Tasks this group can try include:

- Using a pizza cutter and can opener
- Scooping batter into muffin cups
- Putting away leftovers
- Pounding chicken
- Skewering food
- Slicing bread
- Chopping some vegetables

10-12+ years old:

This age group can usually work independently in the kitchen. Before letting them do grown-up tasks on their own, they should have close adult supervision to assess whether they can follow basic safety rules such as:

- Tucking pan handles
- Unplugging electrical appliances
- Safely using a chef's knife

The Cost of Convenience

A big reason take out is so popular is that it saves time. Parents and other caregivers juggle work, childcare, and all the curve balls life inevitably throws at us. Making a meal with your family may be viewed as another item on the ever-growing to do list.

But what is the convenience worth to you? Consider what you are sacrificing in the long term for the sake of convenience in the present. The inconvenience of spending more time and energy in the kitchen now could outweigh the long-term effects of food takeout. The benefits of family mealtime extend far beyond the kitchen. Scheduling an hour or two per week to cook a meal with your kids could help prevent obesity, the onset of eating disorders, substance use, and academic behavioral issues. As added benefits, cooking with kids can foster a supportive home environment and teach kids skills in the kitchen that enhance independence and confidence in other areas of their lives.

Cooking with kids doesn't have to be as time consuming as it seems. Let the Kids Cook Monday program help. This Healthy Monday program offers support on how to integrate a family-cooked meal into your routine easily, complete with recipes, detailed instructions for both adults and kids, and cooking hacks. Check out their [recipes](#) and [resources](#) to get started.

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