

Why Moms of Young Kids Matter

Share Our Strength is working to ensure that every child in America has access to nutritious food where she lives, learns, and plays. Focusing on where kids *live*, Cooking Matters provides food skills education to parents, family members, and caregivers who impact the eating habits of low-income children.

Especially important in this equation are moms of young children (ages 5 and under). These moms are in a crucial position when it comes to their child's eating habits and health. They hold a heavy influence over family food decisions, from shopping to meal prep, and are often more open to making lasting changes toward a healthier lifestyle.

Moms make the food decisions.

- Mothers are responsible for most food purchase decisions and meal preparation. According to a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) study, in a two-adult household, nearly 80% of females identify themselves as the person who usually does the grocery shopping. Almost 80% of females also identified themselves as the person who usually does the meal preparation.
- In a one-adult household, females identify themselves as responsible for food purchase decisions 98% of the time and meal preparation 94% of the time.¹

Young moms make bigger changes.

- New mothers are particularly open to behavior change. Research shows that first-time moms tend to make the biggest improvements in positive eating behaviors, like eating breakfast every day and eating fruits and vegetables. Lower-income moms also make bigger changes than higher-income moms.²

Rather than focus on all moms, however, Cooking Matters recognizes the supreme importance of reaching moms while their children are still very young. Early childhood is a time when access to nutritious food is integral to growth and development and has long-lasting implications for lifelong healthy relationships with food.

Young children are at a crucial development stage...

- The brain undergoes dramatic development during the early childhood years, building cognitive, social, and emotional capacity along with advancement in language and motor skills.^{3,4} According to the World Health Organization, "Early childhood is the most intensive period of brain development during the lifespan. Adequate stimulation and nutrition are essential for development during the first three years of life."⁵

...and are highly vulnerable to poverty and poor nutrition.

- Children ages 0 to 5 are more vulnerable to the effects of poverty, especially those that live in a single-mother household. According to U.S. Census data, in 2011 the poverty rate for children under 6 was 24.5% (compared

¹ USDA Economic Research Service. American Time Use Survey, Eating and Health Module. Table 3 – Usual grocery shopper and usual meal preparer in household for the population age 18 and older, 2008 annual averages. Last updated 4/2/2010.)

² Christine M Olson. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior. Tracking of Food Choices across the Transition to Motherhood. J Nutr Educ Behav. 2005 May-Jun;37(3):129-36.

³ Rosales F, Reznick J, and Zeisel S. Understanding the Role of Nutrition in the Brain and Behavioral Development of Toddlers and Preschool Children: Identifying and Overcoming Methodological Barriers. Nutr Neurosci. 2009 October ; 12(5): 190–202.

⁴ Sakai KL. Language acquisition and brain development. Science 2005;310:815–9

⁵ World Health Organization Fact Sheets: Early Child Development. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs332/en/>.

to 21.4% for all children under 18). For children under 6 living in a single-mother household, the poverty rate more than doubled to 57.2%.⁶

- Children in this age range are also vulnerable to unhealthy dietary patterns and the health consequences associated with these habits. A national survey of the dietary habits of 3,022 infants and toddlers between the ages of 7-24 months found, on an average day, 18-33% consumed no servings of vegetables and 23-33% consumed no servings of fruit. French fries were the most commonly consumed vegetable among children aged 15-24 months.⁷ A study of the nation's 3.8 million preschool children served by WIC programs in state health department found that 26% were overweight.⁸

Early habits last a lifetime.

- Children's dietary preferences and intake are influenced by early experiences with food. Studies show children introduced to fruits and vegetables early on tend to have healthier diets throughout childhood.⁹ Little change occurs in dietary patterns from the preschool years into early adolescence, and childhood diet is a significant determinant of adult diet.^{10, 11}

In 2013, 34% of Cooking Matters at the Store tour participants and adult Cooking Matters course participants were moms of kids 0-5.¹² With an increased focus on reaching this group with food skills education programming, Cooking Matters aims to create a significant impact on the eating habits and health of young children.

⁶ Source: United States Census Bureau. Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance in the United States: 2011.

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2011/index.html>.

⁷ Fox MK, Pac S, Devaney B, and Jankowski L. Feeding infants and toddlers study: What foods are infants and toddlers eating? J Am Diet Assoc. 2004 Jan;104(1 Suppl 1):s22-30.

⁸ Cole N. The Prevalence of Overweight Among WIC Children. Alexandria, Va: US Dept of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service; 2001. Publication WIC-01 PCOM.)

⁹ Cooke, L. The importance of exposure for healthy eating in childhood: a review. The British Dietetic Association Ltd 2007. J Hum Nutr Diet, 20, pp. 294-301.)

¹⁰ Northstone K and P Emmett. Multivariate analysis of diet in children at four and seven years of age and associations with socio-demographic characteristics. European Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2005) 59, 751-760. doi:10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602136 Published online 20 April 2005.

¹¹ Mikkilä V, Räsänen L, Raitakari O, JMarniemi J, Pietinen P, Rönnemaa T and Viikari J. Major dietary patterns and cardiovascular risk factors from childhood to adulthood. The Cardiovascular Risk in Young Finns Study. British Journal of Nutrition v98: July 2007, pp 218-225.

¹² As of 9/30/13.