

Ich kann kochen!

Nutritional education with a good taste

Children are naturally curious. Most of them enjoy exploring the vast world of foodstuffs with all their senses. This is where the initiative Ich kann kochen! comes in: Its desire is to encourage children as early as possible to have a balanced diet. Ich kann kochen! therefore offers further training to professionals and teachers through training courses in the whole of Germany. As qualified gourmet ambassadors they will then carry their knowledge of the practical aspects of nutritional education to their institutions.



Who is the brain behind Ich kann kochen! ?

The initiators of Ich kann kochen! are the Sarah Wiener Stiftung and BARMER. Ich kann kochen! is the largest initiative for the practical nutritional education of daycare/nursery (Kita) and primary school children in the whole of Germany. It is a project partner of IN FORM, the Federal Government's action plan for healthy nutrition and more physical activity.

The Sarah Wiener Stiftung

Since 2007, the mission of the Sarah Wiener Stiftung has been: "For healthy children and eating useful things". The founder and chef, Sarah Wiener, would like to turn children into balanced eaters, creative chefs and informed consumers. The Foundation's practically-oriented education programmes impart knowledge to the children about the origins of our foodstuffs, how varied the foodstuffs are and the type of dishes that can be prepared from them. The Foundation offers further training to educational professionals and teachers, initiates trips to farms, organises workshops and makes publications.

www.sarah-wiener-stiftung.de

BARMER

"Promoting good health" means for us: thinking ahead and charting new ways of leading a healthy life. We have the challenge of providing the best possible care to our insured clients. This includes opening all opportunities to children so that they can have a healthy start to life. This is why we support activities and initiatives that contribute to the creation of healthy child daycare centres and schools. Besides, we also promote health literacy and we are partners in a growing health market.

www.barmer.de

On the following pages you will find some summarised information about the eating habits of children, which Ich kann kochen! would like to share with you.

Children and food – some tips



The allure of colour: Start with red vegetables.

The eye eats too. This applies to the table decoration and also to the choice of foodstuffs. The colour red signifies ripeness, sweetness and therefore safety. Many children would rather try red vegetables than green ones.

Everyone has his own taste: Tell us about it.

Having a meal together is a good opportunity to talk to each other – even about food itself. Encourage children to express their tastes in words. Not everybody must like everything, and children too should be allowed to express this; general statements like “that is awful” or “yuck” are taboo, though.

Children want to recognise what they eat: Serve the various foods in separate plates.

Foods that are all mixed together make many children suspicious, because they cannot recognise what is in there. A mixed salad can also be brought to the table in individual components, with separate sauce for everyone to mix on their own. Even the fruit for the quark can be served extra.

Enjoying with all senses: Once in a while, let the children eat with their hands.

Eating with a knife and fork poses some bit of challenge to the children, and sometimes takes away the appetite from them. Eating with the hands widens the spectrum of sensory perceptions – and also arouses the curiosity of critical eaters.

Conclusion: Children should get to know as many foodstuffs and taste perceptions as possible. This might mean that they will (first) reject something – that is normal, because something new needs time. Exemplify the enjoyment and offer the children the various foodstuffs again and again.

Some taste preferences are innate: Use your knowledge.

If children love what is sweet and reject what is bitter: Choose recipes with sweet vegetables like carrots, maize or fine peas for starters. Many children have less trouble with that than with broccoli or spinach.

Something new needs time: Just be patient and calm.

Children often have to feel, smell or taste new foodstuffs or dishes eight to ten times before those dishes can even get a chance to be liked. So don't simply give up if the plate full of veggie party is first shoved away.

Foodstuffs are diverse: Make the children curious by tasting.

Some children love chewing raw apples, others get an unpleasant feeling in the mouth. Specific tasting of the various foodstuffs widens the taste sensations of children and arouse their curiosity for (unknown) foodstuffs.

Participation in decision-making instead of fixed rules: Find common rules.

Sweet things also have their place on the menu. Because: Forbidden fruit is sweet. Draw up rules together with the children, when to have something sweet on the menu. The right to have a say also applies to trying foodstuffs: Let the children decide for themselves what they want to try. If you force them, that will spark off resistance and food will be associated with negative feelings.

How our taste develops



The first taste preferences develop already in the mother's womb.

What the mother eats during pregnancy and the breastfeeding period also catches on with the child. Unborn children perceive the taste of the food, for example, through the amniotic fluid, while babies perceive it through the mother's milk. Children whose mothers ate varied and diverse foodstuffs during pregnancy and the breastfeeding period are often more open-minded towards new tastes.

Bitter foods arouse scepticism, particularly with children.

Our sense of taste for bitter things helped our ancestors to sort foodstuffs according to the categories "edible" and "inedible", because many bitter things are unpleasant or poisonous. This instinct is innate to all of us. If later on we are positively impressed by the bitter - edible - foodstuffs, we shall then learn to like them.

A sweet taste signals safety and lots of energy.

The fact that many children particularly love sweet things has to do with our survival instinct. This is because there is nothing in nature that is sweet and at the same time poisonous. Our ancestors already knew this. In addition, a sweet taste was for them a sign of high concentration of energy, that is to say many readily available calories in a small mass - further help for survival. Today our survival is assured, but the love of sweet things has remained. This often makes us take in more energy than is good for us.

Conclusion: Small children are in principle open to new eating and taste experiences. If children eat a variety of foodstuffs in a beautiful environment with positive role models, this can influence their nutritional biography to a considerable extent. The food they eat and how they eat it depends crucially on the personal and cultural environment and the upbringing at home, at the daycare centre, nursery or primary school, in addition to their innate behaviours.

Over time, children come to like what is offered to them repeatedly.

The fact that many children reject their first spoonful of porridge is something which has been well conceived by nature. Something unknown is first of all considered unpalatable. If we repeatedly get the experience that we can tolerate a particular foodstuff well, it will become palatable to us. The biological safety programme behind this is: "What I know, I can eat without any worry". In technical jargon this phenomenon is called "mere exposure effect".

A one-sided selection of dishes has its natural limits.

If we eat the same dish everyday, we will soon get fed up of it. This biological safety programme is the very opposite of the "mere exposure effect": We need a variety of nutrients. If our feeding is too one-sided, our body soon switches into rejection mode. By doing this, it ensures that we eat a variety of foodstuffs and hence get all important nutrients.

External influences and our culture shape our eating habits all life long.

Learning by observation is important for the development of healthy eating habits. Cooking and eating are therefore ideally a social experience. In that process, a good atmosphere free of any constraints and prohibitions is just as important as positive role models who derive fun from being able to have and enjoy a healthy diet.



Enjoyment messages which we want to pass on to you



Eating also means enjoyment. It should be fun and taste good.

We want to inculcate healthy eating habits in children, but: Health is no argument to children. Many children associate the word "healthy" with patronage and in most cases also with the experience that "it does not taste nice after all". But spinach can also be downright delicious. Therefore, let your decisions be guided preferably by motives like enjoyment, fun and recognition.

Foodstuffs are valuable. Consider the journey from the field to the plate.

Nutritional education that looks only at the "healthy" or "unhealthy" side of food falls short of the mark, in our view. Food is a valuable commodity. Children learn this best by getting acquainted with the entire value chain of our foodstuffs – the more practically oriented, the better. Once in a while go shopping with the children, create a nursery bed, cook or visit a farm.

Eat together in a pleasant atmosphere – eating culture is important.

Eating together at a nicely laid table is part of such a culture. The aim here is not just to get satisfied, but rather to experience good food as something positive and to gather taste experiences. In this way, children experience the culture of eating together and learn not least to appreciate self-prepared food and the effort put to prepare it.

Conclusion: Together with you, we would like to make sure that children grow up to be autonomous, responsible eaters. You will not be able to achieve this by categorising foodstuffs as "healthy" and "unhealthy" or by denying children a chance to have a say. Instead you should offer children a variety of foodstuffs and as much as possible let them decide on their own and participate in the cooking.

As a contact person you are a role model without having to pretend.

No matter how you eat and what you eat, children will copy a lot from you, because being a trusted contact person you are a role model. Therefore, talk about food – tell them what tastes good to you and why. If you cannot or do not like to eat something, say it also honestly and explain it, because children can understand very fast, if they are being lied to.

Children are entitled to have a say and they act autonomously.

Children should always decide by themselves whether they want to try a new dish or not. You should not deny them the chance to have a say at the dining table, because coercion generally leads to refusal. If children are allowed to have a say on what or how should be cooked, and if they help in the cooking, this will increase the willingness of many of them to also try the ready food later.

Cooking with fresh foodstuffs boosts one's confidence in one's own abilities.

When children cook with fresh, original foodstuffs, they will understand those foodstuffs in the true sense of the word. They will get to know the foodstuffs, their origin and their preparation. In addition, they will also make another important discovery: The children will learn that they too can create something delicious from fresh foodstuffs.