

Summer Safety (Part 2)

There are many ways children benefit from being in the kitchen helping or working independently in food preparation. If your children will be responsible for preparing some of their own meals, you should discuss kitchen safety with them as well. Teach them to use different kitchen tools and equipment appropriate to their age. Regardless of what food preparation they are involved in, the first rule in the kitchen is always the same: Children should always wash their hands with warm soapy water before they begin working in the kitchen. Parents should follow this rule as well!

Knife Safety: Knife safety is a good topic to begin with. Whether they are spreading butter or cutting a sandwich in half, using a knife safely is important. Show them where the cutting board is stored and how to hold a knife safely as they retrieve it from the drawer or butcher block (carry by the handle with tip of knife pointed toward the ground.) Remind them to always use a cutting board and cut away from their body not towards. If the knife skips off the edge of the food (apples, for example), keeping the sharp edge away from them will reduce the risk of cutting themselves. As an extra precaution, you can purchase knives that are safer for kids to use. Simply use the search engine of your choice to find “child safe knives” and review the many alternatives that come up. It is always wise to have parent or adult supervision in the kitchen when children are using knives.

Toaster Safety: Learning how to use small appliances is also important for their safety in the kitchen. A common breakfast item is regular toast, toasted English muffins or toasted bagels. The toaster is a quick and easy appliance for children to use, but it is also dangerous if not used properly. Teach them how to safely use the toaster to avoid fire or electric shock. Begin by explaining that the outside and top of the toaster will get hot, so they need to make sure there is nothing touching these parts of the toaster. They should not try to dislodge bread slices when they get stuck in the toaster. That is a parent’s task. Warn them of the potential for shocking themselves if they try to put metal inside the toaster. The toaster should be unplugged when not in use. All electric appliances are required by law to have safety information accompany the product’s packaging. Look these over carefully before you encourage your child to use the toaster. If you no longer have that printed information, you can find it on the internet using the brand and model number as search preferences.

Toaster Oven Safety: This is also a handy small appliance to have in the kitchen. However, the temperature and heating element design is more dangerous than that of the toaster. Children should be supervised in using this appliance.

Microwave Safety: This is the third most common piece of electronic equipment manufactured in the United States behind digital TVs and DVD players, according to *Appliance Magazine*. They have been on the market for many years and there are a wide variety of microwave ovens found in American Households. Each brand and type

will have its own specific safety guidelines for use, but there are a few general guidelines that will be common to all brands and models.

Begin by showing your child the specific features of the microwave they will be using. Show them the start and stop buttons, as well as the "add a minute" feature. For older children, you can show them how to adjust the power levels. Food that needs warmed up should be set for a longer amount of time at a lower power level whereas food that needs to be cooked usually requires full power.

A microwave should not be started when it is empty. Use microwave-safe containers only. You will need to explain and show your children which containers are safe to use in the microwave – glass, ceramic, or ones labeled "microwave-safe". Don't use cold storage containers, Styrofoam, or plastic containers that once held such things as margarine spread or sour cream, or metal containers. The cold storage containers and repurposed plastic containers are not designed to safely absorb the heat from the food. The plastic may melt into the food.

Foods cooked or warmed in the microwave should be placed in a single layer or in a circle. Microwaves will be able to penetrate the food more evenly thus heating the food more evenly.

Remind children that the microwave not only heats up the food, but also heats the container they use in the microwave. For this reason, they need to use pot holders to remove dishes from the microwave oven. It's also a good idea to let the food remain in the microwave for a few minutes after it has finished its timed cook to ensure that it stops bubbling and hot spots are reduced.

Foods cooked or warmed in the microwave should be covered with wax paper or a paper towel to promote even cooking and reduce splattering inside the oven. Food pieces that spill or bubble over the edge can become too hot and begin to burn.

Finally, remind children that they should eat the food within two hours of cooking it, regardless of what small appliance they used. They need to make sure they put their leftovers in the refrigerator as soon as they are finished eating, as well. This will keep the food safe to eat for the next time.

For more tips on cooking with kids in the kitchen, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!