

# Teaching children about food

Growing up, we ate what was set on the table in front of us. Mom didn't fix "kid friendly" meals or cater to our tastes. We ate normal, wholesome meals—usually with beef from the farm, milk from our dairy, eggs from my uncle's farm, and vegetables from our garden. We were those kids at school with the uncool lunches. I credit my mom for not buying into what was easy or trendy but just sending along leftovers from supper the night before or a simple sandwich. We also didn't have unhealthy snacks at home or lots of baked goods to eat. I remember eating Mom's canned pickles and cheese or leftovers for snacks after school.

We always had a large garden, and my siblings and I helped weed, plant, pick, and preserve produce. We were always the most helpful on days that we were told we could go swimming afterward. I remember picking rocks on the first day of summer vacation from school. As Dad would say, "It builds character." My grandmas would often come over to help us snap green beans, shell limas, work sweet corn, or can peaches.

Now that I have children of my own, I feel a great responsibility to pass on my heritage of food to them. My husband and I have a garden, and our daughter Caroline loves to help pick produce. We are still working on developing her love for weeding. It seems like academic skills are being pushed on children at a younger age these days. I say let children be children and learn life skills before first grade. Young children can learn how to be responsible and feed their pet, how to clean up after themselves, how to make simple foods, and how to respect authority figures— whether it's a parent, a grandparent, or a neighbor.

One way I have let Caroline help in the kitchen is premeasuring ingredients for a simple recipe like Protein Balls (p. 283) and letting her pour all the ingredients together and mix them. She has started to help make her dad's egg sandwiches for his work breakfast, and she seems to receive great joy from helping make his food. Anytime the mixer is turned on in our house, you can bet a little girl will come and ask to sit on the counter and help.

It's not always easy letting Caroline help, or teaching her to be responsible. But she is a child, and she needs to be taught by us. We are not perfect parents by any means, but these are some things we strive for.

## PROTEIN BALLS

*Makes about 25 balls*

*I've found myself mixing up this recipe many evenings after nine o'clock. It's usually because I'm hankering for a bedtime snack. These balls are also great for an afternoon pick-me-up with iced coffee. If you are rushed for time, you can skip melting the chocolate chips and just add them to the main filling.*

1½ cup crispy rice cereal  
1½ cup rolled oats  
2/3 cup shredded sweetened coconut  
½ cup dried cranberries  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1 cup peanut butter  
½ cup honey  
2 tablespoons protein powder  
(optional)

## Topping

½ cup semisweet chocolate chips  
sea salt

Using a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix together all ingredients except those for topping until well combined. Using a small cookie scoop, form balls. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Place in the freezer until firm, about 10 minutes. Melt chocolate chips and drizzle over protein balls with a fork. Sprinkle with sea salt.

From *Hope's Table: Everyday Recipes from a Mennonite Kitchen*, by Hope Helmuth ©2019 Herald Press. Used with permission.