

Mail Today

Look it up with your little chefs at home

by Anindita D. Choudhury

HAVE YOU met your little chef yet? You don't have to look too far. The little chef is right here, at home, peeking into your kitchen, looking at you while you toil in the heat. And then when you are done, she carefully tastes the meal and gives her verdict... And finally you heave a sigh of relief. And you thought the kitchen is your bastion!

Little Subhamita is just seven and knows how to make sandwiches, pizzas and the secret recipe for her mother's special omelette. Apart from shelling peas and stocking vegetables in the refrigerator, she dutifully follows her mother into the kitchen on a holiday and observes her as she cooks. Though she wants to be Miss World when she grows up, it wouldn't be a surprise if she grows into high-profile chef.

The credit goes to her mother, who always made it a point to take Subhamita to the kitchen whenever she cooked. "Right from age one, I took her to the kitchen and made her sit there and watch me. Not only did she learn new things about food, but also gave me company," says her mother Shubra Datta, a housewife. The kitchen provides for a great place for them to bond. "Otherwise when you have to cook every day, it gets very mundane," adds Shubra.

Children's books author too Vanita Vaid had plenty of help in the kitchen. Two little chefs were always ever-ready to assist her with the cooking. Addressing a session on 'Cooking with your child' at the *Good Housekeeping Show* last week, she shared her experiences as well as some easy-to-cook recipes.

"Children love it when they are given some responsibility. They love to create new things," says Vaid. And then eating your creation has a charm of its own. "It won't just help you feed your fussy eater, but will also introduce concepts such as counting and measuring," adds Vaid.

The kitchen is often a 'no entry zone' for children. "Most of the children would not know how to make tea till they are 15," says Shubra who plans to teach Subhamita how to use the oven in another three years.

Right now, 25-year-old Preeti Sawhney is having a hard time learning the 'ABC' of cooking. She has enrolled herself in a crash-course designed especially for girls who are about to get married. "I was never allowed to enter the kitchen when I was small. When my mother prepared chapatis, I was just given a ball of kneaded flour to play with," says Sawhney, a BPO executive, who will be getting married in November. "I've always been pampered by my parents. But now I need to get my act together," she says.

ARUN MALHOTRA, 23, too suffers from 'I wish my mom taught me how to cook syndrome'. Malhotra, a software engineer, halts from Chandigarh and is living in Delhi along with his roommates. His daily routine includes getting up in the morning, and rushing to the office canteen after a hasty shower. "I come back home at about eight, after having dinner in the canteen. Except for making tea and Maggi, I don't know a thing about cooking," says Malhotra who, like an ideal Punjabi mamma's boy has been fed *desi ghee paranthas*, but has no clue how they are made. Now he is surviving on 'unhealthy' canteen

Antara Chakraborty guides her five-year-old son Josh as he chops tomatoes for making sandwiches at breakfast



Don't ban your children from entering the kitchen. Let them squish fruits, garnish the desserts and make yummy vegetable sandwiches. They will have fun and so will you

food, chips and coke.

"Children should be introduced to the kitchen zone at an early age," says Vaid. "Parents should always encourage them to learn about what they are eating. That way their interest in food grows and they don't throw any tantrums while eating."

Harpreet Singh has a problem in getting his three-year-old son, Happy, to eat cooked vegetables. "He will not touch the sabji. He eats his *chapati* with jam along with raw vegetables. He just doesn't like them cooked," says Singh. Besides the cooked veggie phobia, Harpreet's son even has an inborn hatred for milk.

Cooking with Happy would be a good solution this problem. "Get your child to prepare his own meals. If the child loves raw vegetables, you can make him prepare sandwiches with raw veggies. Or maybe you could have a dining table discussion about the advantages of eating vegetables with your partner," says Vaid.

Just remember that your child listens to everything you say, so he will make a mental note of the discussion. As far as milk is concerned, Vaid says you could use a fancy tumbler—or make a ballerina out of the tumbler. "It is easy. Put in a straw and get your child to cut out a round



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— Vanita Vaid, author

paper umbrella from a magazine. And then wrap it around the straw, like in a cocktail. Your child will love to drink it when he sees his glass all decked up."

Such activities are ideal for the summer holidays. Instead of sending your children to various crash courses, you can spend some time with your child and have some fun. Interestingly, lots of children are getting enrolled in cooking academies.

"There are several children, especially boys, who join in and learn to make simple dishes such as sandwiches, cakes, pizzas and pastas," says Kiran Girotra, who has been teaching cookery in her Hobby Centre in Pitampura.

Fast-to-cook, great-to-eat finger-foods are a favourite with children. Dr Honey Khanna, senior dietician Max Healthcare, offers another solution for fussy eaters. "You can boil *chana*, add salt and a bit of *masala*, mash it and then

make little balls—put them on ice-cream sticks and fry them," says Khanna. You could get your child to mash the *chana* mixture.

"Children love mashing and squishing things," says Vaid. "You could get them to squish fruits in a bowl and then put them in a conical piping bag and make designs on cookies and cakes," she adds.

Some children go beyond squishing fruits. Jahnvi Gupta, who has cooked with her mother since she was six, shares her story. "At seven, my younger brother invented his own potato chips recipe. All he did was cut pieces of potato, poke them with a fork and burn them over the flame. We all had to eat it, because it was his special recipe," she says.

"Your little chef might not come up with something like this, but it's worth giving him a chance and seeing how innovative he can get."

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YUMMY FOR THE TUMMY

Children's books author, Vanita Vaid suggests some recipes for your kids

1. Idli baskets: Take ready-made Idlis and scoop out the middle portion of the Idlis with a spoon. Boll finely-chopped vegetables with a little salt and put the mixture in the Idlis. And then finally to make it look like a real basket, you can take strips of carrots, or coriander stems or even *papad* (cut into strips, fried and herb), bend them and make the basket handle.

2. Jam Tarts: All you need is Britannia butter biscuits or Nutrichoice biscuits and jam. Take a piping bag (you can make the piping bag out of butter-paper or empty milk poly-packs), fill it with jam and ask your child to design the cookies with the jam. He will have fun. It is a great idea for a birthday party snack too.

3. Stars on my plate: Take a star-shaped cookie cutter and cut pieces of bread. Spread it with cheese and garnish with vegetables.