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## Kids in the kitchen

### A new generation is growing up cooking

Tara Duggan, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Max Burstein shops at the San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market when planning dinner for friends. He's helping develop the menu for his family's new hotel-restaurant in Arizona. His current favorite cookbook is "Stacks: The Art of Vertical Food."

Max is 13.

"(My dad) likes those 15-minute, five-ingredient books. I'm not into that," says Max, who spends alternate weeks in Berkeley with his father and in Moraga his mother. "I wouldn't say I'm a perfectionist, but I wouldn't say that five ingredients in 15 minutes does it for me."

Max is one of a growing number of kids with a passion for cooking. The explosion of food television has played a role, but so have educational and health organizations that have begun focusing on food and cooking in response to the epidemic of childhood obesity. Although the goal of these groups is to improve nutrition, not to create an army of mini Wolfgang Pucks, the overall affect is that more kids are making their own dinner.

At public events, TV chefs such as Rachael Ray often draw more tween fans than 35- to 45-year-olds.

"When you see a kid at a book signing with a T-shirt he's made that says 'Rachael Rules,' you can see the impact we've had," says Mark O'Connor, company spokesman for Food Network.

The Bay Area is driving much of the kids' cooking movement. Individually, local kids are taking cooking classes, publishing cookbooks and leading cooking demos for their peers. A new Napa company, Zoup-ah, is launching a children's lifestyle brand later this year with a cooking show, culinary academies, restaurants and cookware line. A series of educational videos dealing with food-related health problems will debut in schools nationwide this spring, featuring seven Bay Area organizations where teens take active roles in improving their health.

"(The Bay Area) is very progressive and definitely a leader in the field," says Carol Snider of Comprehensive Health Education Foundation, a Seattle organization that produces the videos.

Kids' increased interest in cooking is a step in the right direction, says Pat Crawford, co-director of UC Berkeley's Center for Weight and Health.

"The more that the kids know what's in the food, the better. If you just go buy a brownie in a store, the kid has no concept of what's in there," says Crawford. "When you're making the food and putting in all the chocolate and putting in the oil, you can see how much of the various food groups are going in."

Crawford is one of the organizers of the California Childhood Obesity Conference wrapping up today in San Diego, where at least one session focused on school programs that get students involved in food and cooking. It's the third year of the conference, and three years since the U.S. Surgeon General declared childhood obesity an epidemic.

"It is the national agenda," says Jeanne Smith, who co-founded Zoup-ah partly because of the epidemic.

Nutritionists agree that the earlier kids learn about eating well, the better their chance of avoiding obesity or diabetes later. But not all parents have time to cook with their children, which has led to a proliferation of kids' cooking classes.

"Fifty to 60 percent (of parents) bring their children because they don't cook," says Lynda Rexroat, owner and instructor of Cooking with Kids, a program offered at various East Bay community centers. "I live in an affluent community -- Ph.Ds, professionals. They don't know a fig about nutrition. No one has time."

Rexroat has seen her enrollment increase over the last two years and attributes much of the growth to the popularity of Food Network. Her classes include children as young as 3 1/2, who do less of the preparation and more of the assembly than her older students.

One day some of her younger students learned to prepare vegetables with dip. When the parents came to pick up their kids, they were stunned, Rexroat says.

"The children were not only eating the vegetables piled on their plate like french fries, they were describing them to each other," she says.

One of Rexroat's more serious students is Nathan Verduzco of Concord, who was just 5 years old when he began cooking with his grandmother. Donning an apron and chef's hat, Nathan will marinate and grill tri-tip for his mother and sister, garnishing their plates with herbs and placing wine in a bucket on the table. His goal is to open a steak and pasta restaurant in San Francisco.

"He likes cooking and he likes dirt bikes," says his mother, Tracy Stratton. Except for bike rides with his friends, the 13-year-old spent last summer watching Food Network.

#### Culinary shows for kids

Erik Stangvik got the idea for his new Napa company, Zoup-ah, when he noticed his 4-year-old daughter sitting rapturously in front of cooking shows. Later this year, his company will launch "Gaspergoo," a cooking show aimed at 4- to 7-year-olds.

The show, produced in partnership with the Canadian children's entertainment company Nelvana, tells the story of two brothers who come to America from the fictional land of Gaspergoo and open a restaurant. "Gaspergoo" will be set in the restaurant's kitchen, which Zoup-ah cofounder Jeanne Smith says is the perfect place to teach kids not just about cooking but about science, art, math and creativity.

"It's an endless, magical place to experiment," says Smith. The show will emphasize the importance of sharing food with friends and family, or the "collective table" in language borrowed from Copia, one of the company's local partners and the site of its offices. Zoup-ah also plans to launch a kids' cookware line with Vallejo's Meyer Corp., and to open children's cooking academies and restaurants in several cities across the country.

The new season of "Sesame Street," which begins in April, will focus attention on eating well and exercise as ways to combat obesity. Sesame Street characters also appear on a new line of healthy cereals and oatmeal from Earth's Best and will adorn signs in supermarket produce sections that encourage kids to "eat their colors."

"In our society everyone wants to eat on the run, and kids don't have an understanding of where food comes from and how it's made," says Rosemarie Truglio, vice president of education and research for Sesame Workshop. "When you get them involved in preparation there's a pride -- 'look at what I made.' And there's an appreciation for food."

Cooking is cool

These media and educational organizations all focus on empowering kids to take care of their health. But for most kids, cooking is just cool.

"It's kind of like they're being different from their parents because many generations before them didn't cook," says Rachelle Boucher, cofounder of Generation Chefs, a mentoring and training program that pairs chefs with Marin County youth, some of whom are considered at-risk. "They're willing to push themselves to try really cool foods because it's hip and sexy from the Food Network."

Teens as teachers

Saturday, three teenage "Generation Chefs" joined chef John Mitchell of Whole Foods in giving a free cooking demonstration for kids at Macy's Union Square.

Representatives of the Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (CHEF), a Seattle organization that has just begun producing educational videos to fight childhood obesity, also finds peer modeling the best approach to teaching.

One video to be shown in schools this spring features the Edible School Yard, the Alice Waters project at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley. It jumps between shots of teens digging in the garden, speaking thoughtfully about produce and preparing a nutritious-looking lunch. With hip-hop music in the background, one of the teenage hosts repeats what sounds like a teen-speak version of the California cuisine mantra.

"It's pretty cool when you get that food doesn't just appear in colorful packages at the supermarket," the teenager says. "And you feel more in control when you know how to take simple ingredients and make something good out of them."

The Bay Area is full of teens who take part in the kind of activism encouraged by the CHEF videos. Last year 14-year-old Elón Graham of Richmond self-published "A Cookbook for Kids Written by a Kid" to help his peers improve their diets. He sends all proceeds to charity. Meghan Luecke, 17, created a cooking class for homeless kids as a volunteer at Hamilton Family Center in San Francisco. Last year, she self-published a cookbook and guide to starting similar programs called "Kids are Cookin'" and has been featured in newspapers across North America and on Bay Area TV shows.

Whether cooking their own food or checking labels in the grocery store, kids know how to take care of themselves better than they often are given credit for. Now that cooking is cool again, this generation may soon surpass their parents in the kitchen.

"I enjoy cooking. It's a hobby. It fills up time when I would just be playing on the computer," says Max. "It's fun to cook for the family and do things they couldn't even do or know how to do."

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Promoting healthy eating habits for kids

Books

"The Baby Bistro Cookbook," by Joohee Muromcew (Rodale Books; 224 pages; \$22.95)

"A Cookbook for Kids Written by a Kid," by Elón Graham. \$8.95 (postage included). Make checks payable to the Bay Area Rescue Mission and send to Camille Abbington (Elón's grandmother), 4424 Taft Ave., Richmond, CA 94804. All proceeds, minus printing and mailing costs, will go to the mission.

"Feeding your Child for Lifelong Health," by Susan Roberts, Ph.D, and Dr. Melvin Heyman (Bantam; 368 pages; \$19)

"If My Child Is Overweight, What Should I Do About It?" by Joanne Ikeda, Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley. \$5 plus \$3 shipping. (800) 994- 8849 or [anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/index.ihtml](http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/index.ihtml).

"Kids Are Cookin'," by Meghan Luecke. \$12 plus \$1.92 postage and handling; free to volunteers. [kidsarecookin.com](http://kidsarecookin.com).

#### Organizations

California Project Lean. Provides resources for parents and kids dealing with obesity. [californiaprojectlean.org](http://californiaprojectlean.org)

Chowbabies. Home delivery of fresh baby food in San Francisco. Meal prices start at \$3; minimum \$10 delivery charge for orders under \$30. Full meal options start at \$175 for four-week delivery of two meals per day. (415) 751-0410 or [chowbabies.com](http://chowbabies.com).

Comprehensive Health Education Foundation (CHEF) FUEL series of educational videos combatting obesity. (800) 323-2433, ext. 1890 or [fuel.chef.org](http://fuel.chef.org).

Cooking with Kids. Series of five to seven classes cost \$85-\$100 per child, in community centers in Orinda, Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Livermore and other locations. (925) 284-3596 or e-mail [cheflyndak@aol.com](mailto:cheflyndak@aol.com).

Generation Chefs and Whole Foods. Free cooking demo for kids at noon, March 12 in Macy's Cellar, Union Square, San Francisco, to be followed bimonthly through 2005. (415) 884-2786 or [generationchefs.com](http://generationchefs.com).

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#### Easiest Pasta & Cheese With Vegetables

This recipe, from "The Baby Bistro Cookbook" author Joohee Muromcew, is a great way to get small children to eat vegetables, and the easiest way to make homemade macaroni and cheese - no grating, melting or stirring a sauce.

#### INGREDIENTS:

2 cups hot cooked pasta, such as elbow macaroni

1/2 cup fresh ricotta cheese

1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese

1/2-1 cup cooked peas or finely chopped cooked broccoli

Diced ham, optional

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

While the pasta is still hot, mix in the ricotta and Parmesan cheeses. Add the vegetables and ham, if using.

Makes about 2 1/2 cups. Serves five 1/2-cup child-size servings

PER SERVING: 115 calories, 6 g protein, 17 g carbohydrate, 3 g fat (2 g saturated), 9 mg cholesterol, 68 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.

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#### Smiley Pizza With Whole Wheat Oatmeal Crust

This recipe, based on "Anytime Pizza" from Susan Roberts and Dr. Melvin Heyman's "Feeding Your Child For Lifelong Health" is a good introduction to whole grains. Little hands can help shape toppings into smiley faces.

## INGREDIENTS:

Oatmeal crust

2 teaspoons yeast

2 cups white flour

1/2 cup whole wheat flour

1 1/3 cups instant or quick-cooking oats

2 tablespoons sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/4 cups water

Pizza

Olive or corn oil cooking spray

1/2 cup tomato sauce (fresh or canned), or more as needed

4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

6 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, grated

Toppings

Yellow onion, finely chopped

Mushrooms or zucchini, thinly sliced

Green bell pepper, thinly sliced

Pineapple, finely diced

## INSTRUCTIONS:

To make the crust: Mix all the ingredients in a food processor and blend for 2 minutes or knead by hand for 5 minutes. The dough will be soft, even slightly sticky. Lightly coat the inside of a large bowl with cooking spray. Remove the dough from the processor, place in a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Allow to rise for 1/2-1 hour to make the dough pliable.

Preheat oven to 450°.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper or coat sheets well with cooking spray. Cut dough equally in half. Cut each half into 8 pieces. Roll each into a ball and stretch out to make a disk about 3-4 inches in diameter. Place 8 disks on each baking sheet. Spray dough lightly with oil and cover for 1/2 hour if you have the time (this last step is not essential).

Divide the tomato sauce evenly among the 16 pizzas. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and then with cheddar cheese. Make smiley faces with the toppings. Bake for 12-15 minutes until cheese is bubbling and starting to brown.

Makes 16 miniature pizzas

PER PIZZA WITHOUT TOPPINGS: 155 calories, 7 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 5 g fat (3 g saturated), 12 mg cholesterol, 276 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

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### Saturday Pancake

Basically a Dutch baby, this lightly sweet, puffy pancake from Max Burstein is great for a crowd at brunch.

### INGREDIENTS:

6 eggs  
1 1/2 cups milk  
1 cup flour  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
2 tablespoons brown sugar  
1/4 cup butter  
2 apples, peeled and thinly sliced

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 425° and place a rack in the center of the oven.

Mix together the eggs, milk, flour, sugar, vanilla and salt.

Combine the cinnamon and brown sugar in a small bowl and set aside.

Place the butter in a 13 x 9-inch baking pan and place it in the oven until it melts.

Add the apple slices to the pan and return to the oven until the butter sizzles; do not let the apples brown, about 8 minutes.

Pour the batter over the apples and sprinkle with the cinnamon-brown sugar mixture. Bake on rack in the center of the oven until puffed and brown, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately.

Serves 8

PER SERVING: 235 calories, 8 g protein, 27 g carbohydrate, 11 g fat (5 g saturated), 178 mg cholesterol, 206 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.

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