**Favorite family feasts: made by you; for you**

A great way to instill healthy eating habits – that will carry through adolescent, teen and adult years – is to get your kids into the kitchen from as young as possible. Knowing where ingredients come from, how to make different dishes, what taste combinations work, as well as the right nutrients needed for a balanced diet can be a fun and empowering learning experience.

Dr Mosima Mabunda, Head of Wellness for Vitality South Africa, has seen first-hand how helpful collaborative cooking is when it comes to her two kids and their nutrition skills. Her top reasons to get kids cooking are:

1. **It helps them develop a more adventurous palate**

Young kids can be fussy eaters, not wanting to move away from certain favorites which may not be as healthy as you’d like. By getting kids in the kitchen – helping you to wash fruit and veg and prepare their plates, you open them up to new tastes as they’re much more likely to sample something they’ve helped make. It’s also a great opportunity to talk about the benefits of balanced eating and how the right foods can help them grow.

1. **It’s a time to have fun and explore**

Better nutrition aside, food prep can be a fun and entertaining activity to bond with your kids – not just when they’re young but even as they get older and their tastes become more refined. Invite your kids to explore their senses through the process. By engaging their senses and making the food appealing from a sight, smell – and even sound – perspective, they’re more likely to enjoy it.

1. **It can boost confidence.**

Measuring, counting, timing, new words, etc. are valuable numerology and language lessons and immediate benefits of the cooking process. Encouraging and praising your child in a kitchen setting – and then all enjoying the results of the process together – is a very fulfilling moment for a child and they’re able to grow in confidence due to feeling this sense of accomplishment. TOP TIP: name the dish after your child or let them name the dish they help prepare.

**Dr Mabunda’s family favorite?** Garden Keeper’s Pie with beets, lentils and creamy celery root mash. Try this delicious dish **developed by the Vitality HealthyFood Studio** and let us know what you think using the hashtag #LiveLifeWithVitality on any of our social media platforms.

SERVES: 4
***Filling ingredients:***

* 1 tbsp olive oil
* 1 cooking onion, diced
* 2 cloves of garlic, minced
* 1 sprig of rosemary, leaves minced
* 4 sprigs of thyme, leaves removed + divided
* pinch of chili flakes (optional)
* 2 tsp balsamic vinegar
* 5 cups-worth of small diced, hardy vegetables (a mix of butternut squash, carrots and beets)
* 1/3 cup black beans or lentils, rinsed and drained
* 2 1/2 cups homemade or sodium reduced vegetable stock.
* 1 tsp tamari reduced sodium soy sauce
* salt + pepper
* 2 tsp arrowroot powder
* 1 tbsp cold filtered water

 ***Mash ingredients:***

* 3 cups peeled + 2.5cm-diced celeriac or sweet potato
* 2 cloves of garlic, peeled
* 1 1/2 tbsp olive oil + extra
* 1/4 cup unsweetened almond milk
* salt + pepper

***Instructions:***

**Step 1**: Preheat the oven to 180°C. Lightly oil 4 gratin dishes or 1 large pie dishes. Place on a sheet pan and set aside.

**Step 2**: For the filling, heat the 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the diced onion and sauté until very, very soft, about 5 minutes, stirring often. Add the minced garlic, rosemary, thyme, and chili flakes (if using) to the pot and stir. Sauté until the garlic is very fragrant, about 45 seconds. Add the balsamic vinegar and stir. Add the 5 cups of diced vegetables and the lentils to the pot and stir to coat everything in the oil. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté the vegetables and lentils for another two minutes or so, stirring often. Add the vegetable stock and tamari/soy sauce and stir. The liquid should cover all the vegetables and lentils nicely, by about a 1 cm. Bring the mixture to a boil and then simmer until the vegetables are tender and the lentils are *just* soft, about 45 minutes. It helps if you place a lid on top of the pot slightly askew, leaving a little gap for air to escape.

**Step 3**: When the filling is done, in a small bowl mix together the arrowroot powder and cold water. Scrape this slurry into the pot with the filling and stir to mix it in. Remove the pot from the heat.

**Step 4**: For the celeriac mash, place the diced celeriac and garlic cloves in a medium saucepan. Cover the vegetables with cold water/vegetable stock if you like, and then place the pot over medium heat. Bring the mixture to a boil and then simmer until the celeriac pieces are tender, about 15 minutes. Drain and place it in a food processor fitted with the "S" blade. Pulse the vegetables a couple times to get them moving. Add the olive oil, unsweetened almond milk, and some salt and pepper. Run the motor on high until you have a cream, homogenous mixture. Check it for seasoning and adjust if necessary.

**Step 5**: Fill the lined dish, then cover with the mash, smoothing it out with a butter knife or spatula. Drizzle a bit of olive oil on top of each pie and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and thyme leaves. Place the assembled pie back on the baking sheet and slide into the oven. Bake the pie until the filling is bubbling and the tops are very lightly browned, about 20 minutes.

**And enjoy!**