

Teach your kids to cook

• FAYE LEVY and YAKIR LEVY
Photos by YAKIR LEVY

Parents do their children a big favor when they teach them how to fix meals and snacks for themselves.

Chef/nutritionist Patricia Greenberg knows this, and that's why she encouraged mothers to bring their children to her cooking class last week. Greenberg, together with her volunteer helpers, teen Meltem Buyuran and her younger brother Emre, demonstrated how easy it is to make colorful stuffed peppers with tuna salad. (See recipe.)

As we watched the kids prepare the stuffed peppers, we wished that we had been taught how to make this tasty, healthy dish when we were growing up. The recipe is in Greenberg's new cookbook, *Scrumptious Sandwiches, Salads and Snacks*, which she wrote with her teenage daughter, Gabriella Grunfeld.

Greenberg's recipes are designed to ensure that kids eat well, alongside adults.

"I hate when parents cook wholesome food for themselves and serve lower quality food as kids' meals, insisting that the children refuse to eat healthy food," said Greenberg.

In developing her recipes, Greenberg kept busy families in mind. Her aim, she said, is to enable parents to get after-school or after-work meals on the table quickly, even if they have little or no experience in the kitchen.

"People shouldn't resort to buying frozen dinners because they think they can't cook," said Greenberg. "Anybody can make this," she commented, as she showed how to prepare her tasty mustard egg salad toast with tomatoes. (See recipe.)

Greenberg keeps the calories of each dish fairly low. Teenagers often watch their weight, and when her daughter mentioned that she would like to eat lighter, Greenberg came up with her bean and cheese wrap enclosed in tender lettuce leaves instead of flatbread. If you have canned or already-cooked beans, you can put this entree together in only a few minutes. It's flavorful, refreshing and perfect for a hot day. (See recipe.)

Here are a few tips from Greenberg for speedily preparing healthy, tasty meals:

- Keep 10 hard-boiled eggs in the fridge so you always have a protein-rich food ready when you need a quick meal or snack.
- Even quickly prepared dishes can be delicious if you use quality ingredients. Make your Greek salad, for example, with sheep's milk feta rather than ordinary feta.
- Once in a while you can "hide" nutritious ingredients in popular dishes. Instead of making the usual tuna salad with mayonnaise, Greenberg adds shredded carrots and corn kernels to her tuna mixture and tops it with halved cherry tomatoes and cucumber slices. For a sweet treat, she conceals grated carrots in her chocolate truffles. (See recipe.)

Faye Levy is the author of 30 Low-Fat Meals in 30 Minutes.



Rainbow of bell peppers stuffed with tuna salad

This colorful dish is especially appealing to young children, wrote Patricia Greenberg. Another way to serve this combination is to cut the peppers in wide strips and use the tuna salad as a dip.

Serves 4 to 6

3 bell peppers: one red, one yellow and one green, stems left on
1 or 2 cucumbers
12 cherry tomatoes
Three 170 gr. cans of tuna
¼ cup shredded carrots
¼ cup corn, canned or fresh
6 Tbsp. light mayonnaise
2 cups baby spinach leaves

Cut peppers in half crosswise through the stems and remove seeds. Cut cucumbers in half lengthwise, and slice them. Cut cherry tomatoes in half.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the tuna, carrots and corn. Add the mayonnaise and toss.

Spread the spinach leaves evenly on four to six small salad plates. Place a pepper half on top of spinach and fill it with the tuna and vegetable mixture. Top with the cucumber slices and cherry tomato halves.

Mustard egg salad and tomato toast

What's the easiest way to cut hard-boiled eggs to make egg salad? "Use a potato masher," said Greenberg, and showed us how easy it is. The eggs were mashed in seconds. If you like, double the egg salad recipe and store the extra in the refrigerator for another meal.

Serves 2 or 4 as an appetizer

Egg salad

4 eggs
1 to 2 Tbsp. mayonnaise
½ Tbsp. whole grain mustard
salt and pepper
1 green onion, finely chopped

Toast

6 cherry tomatoes
4 slices multigrain bread
Salt and pepper

Basil leaves (optional garnish)

To make hard-boiled eggs: Put the eggs in a small pot, add water to fill the pot and bring to a boil. Cover with a lid, remove from heat and let sit for 10 minutes. Drain and rinse with cool water to chill. Peel immediately.

In a mixing bowl, chop the eggs (a potato masher does this quickly) and combine with mayonnaise, mustard, salt, pepper and green onion.

For the toast, cut the cherry tomatoes in half. Toast the bread slices and spread ½ cup egg salad across two slices of toast. Top with the tomato halves and sprinkle with salt and pepper. If you like, garnish with basil leaves.

Bean and cheese lettuce wraps

"When you are looking for a no-bread option, lettuce really fits the bill," wrote Greenberg. Brown rice and beans make these wraps satisfying. Greenberg makes these quickly using canned beans and Mexican salsa from a jar. To make your own quick salsa, see the note following the recipe.

Serves 4

4 large tender lettuce leaves
A 400-440 gr. can mixed beans or black beans
½ cup chopped red onion
1 cup cooked brown rice
225 gr. grated Parmesan cheese
½ cup mild tomato salsa from a jar, or pureed or diced tomatoes mixed with a bit of s'hug or hot pepper sauce
2 Tbsp. chopped cilantro (fresh coriander)

Clean lettuce leaves; set on plate. Drain and rinse beans.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine beans, onions, rice, cheese and salsa, and gently toss. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Fill each leaf with bean mixture and top with cilantro.

Note: For a quick salsa, finely chop ¼ cup cilantro sprigs in mini food processor. Cut ¼ onion in small pieces, add to food processor and chop. Transfer to a bowl. Quarter 170 gr. tomatoes, add to processor and coarsely chop. Add to cilantro mixture. Add 1 Tbsp. water if salsa is too dry. Season to taste with salt and hot pepper sauce.

Parfait Patricia

Greenberg wrote about this parfait that it is "reminiscent of an after-school ice cream sundae with double the health benefits." The topping is a mixture of nuts, dried fruit and breakfast cereals. Vary the nuts, dried fruits and cereal in the trail mix to your taste.

Serves 8

8 fresh strawberries or 1 to 1½ cups halved grapes or slices of other fresh fruit, such as peaches or nectarines
2 cups vanilla yogurt
2 cups homemade trail mix (see note below)
For serving: eight small glass jars or plastic "to-go" cups

Remove stems from strawberries. Cut berries in half. In the jar, layer strawberry slices, then yogurt, then trail mix.
Repeat layers and serve.

Note: For homemade trail mix - in a large container, mix ½ cup fiber twig cereal, ½ cup dried cranberries, ½ cup chopped almonds, one cup square-shaped rice cereal, one cup multigrain puffed cereal and ¼ cup large unsweetened coconut flakes. The mix keeps for several months in a tightly sealed container.

Chocolate carrot truffles

"The crown jewel of my book are these chocolate carrot truffles," said Greenberg. The truffles are flavored with coconut, almonds and maple syrup, and they need no cooking. They will keep up to a week in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Serves 12

½ cup shredded coconut
½ cup shredded carrots
¼ cup roasted unsalted almonds
¼ cup roasted unsalted cashews
1 Tbsp. peanut butter, or nut butter of choice
1 Tbsp. maple syrup, or to taste
¼ tsp. vanilla extract
1 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
Ground ginger to taste
Salt to taste

Set aside a small amount of shredded coconut (and shredded carrots, if you wish) for garnish.

Line a tray or baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a food processor, pulse shredded carrots until fine. Add coconut and nuts and pulse until combined and finely chopped.

While pulsing, add these ingredients one at a time: peanut butter, one tablespoon maple syrup, vanilla, cocoa powder, spices and salt. Blend all ingredients till smooth, letting the motor run until the dough comes together and nearly forms a ball; this can take two to three minutes.

Taste the mixture, and if you like, adjust the sweetness by adding a little more maple syrup; blend again. Transfer to a bowl.

Scoop chunks of dough with a tablespoon and roll into balls. Sprinkle the tops with the shredded coconut and carrot reserved for garnish. Place on the parchment-lined tray.

Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes or in the freezer for 15 minutes.

Greek salad

Since visiting Greece and enjoying the flavorful food, Greenberg includes this salad on her menus often. For a dairy-free twist, she recommends marinating firm tofu in the dressing, and then using it to top the salad at the last minute.

Serves 4

Dressing

2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon oregano
¼ cup olive oil
salt and pepper

Salad

454 gr. plum tomatoes
1 large cucumber
1 very small red onion
¼ cup pitted Kalamata olives
115 gr. crumbled feta cheese, preferably made from sheep's milk

Pour vinegar and oregano into a medium bowl. Using a fork or whisk, pour in olive oil in a fine stream while beating. Season with salt and pepper.

Thinly slice tomatoes, cucumber and red onion; or if you prefer, dice the tomatoes and the cucumber and chop the onion in thin slivers.

On four salad plates, evenly alternate sliced tomatoes and cucumber, overlapping them in a circular pattern; or mix the diced tomatoes and cucumber and chopped onion. Top with olives, crumbled feta and onion slices. Drizzle with dressing and serve.