

The Good Food Cooking Skills Handbook



We love cooking and sharing knowledge and skills with others. This handbook was created for anyone teaching cooking skills in Oxfordshire.

It brings together everything you need for your own cooking skills sessions in one place – the foundations of learning and teaching, guidance and resources for organising high quality and successful sessions and consistent messages for healthy, affordable and sustainable cooking.

If you use this handbook and the Good Food Cooking Sessions Scorecard for your sessions, you will be able to demonstrate a basic standard for your sessions to funders and commissioners, maintain your reputation in providing high quality sessions and create dynamic and varied courses for your participants.

We hope you enjoy it!



This handbook is a free resource for people who teach cooking skills in Oxfordshire, with sections on healthy eating, affordable food and sustainability.

First published by Good Food Oxford in 2018 as The Good Food Cooking Skills Framework, revised as Good Food Cooking Skills Handbook in 2021. With support from Oxfordshire County Council.



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

What is the Good Food Cooking Skills Handbook?

This Good Food Cooking Skills Handbook is a resource pack for cooking facilitators and teachers working across Oxfordshire. It is an updated version of the Good Food Cooking Framework which was compiled in 2018. The handbook covers all aspects of planning, hosting, leading and evaluating your cooking sessions. It can be used as a checklist to help guide you, the facilitator. It contains segments on healthy eating, affordability and sustainability, with suggestions about how to incorporate these into your sessions. The examples are intended to help, but not limit you, in your planning. Feel free to look through all the activities provided and use them or create your own based on a key message. The resources included at the back will help to provide effective cooking classes with consistent core messages for all types of food and different community groups. The resources are available for download from goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

This handbook will help you plan your session, teach with confidence and measure your effectiveness. It includes helpful suggestions and some top tips from experienced facilitators. We also included a tick list to make sure you don't forget anything important. Whether you're only just getting started or have been leading sessions about cooking, health or nutrition for years, you'll find something useful in these pages.

Background

Access to good food is one of our basic human rights¹, but in the UK approximately one in ten people experience food poverty². Diet-related ill health is a big problem for people especially in more deprived areas of Oxfordshire, with life expectancy differing by as much as 12 years between the most and least affluent communities. A total of 18% of 4 to 5 year olds and 29% of 10 to 11 year olds are overweight in Oxfordshire. In 2015, only 58% of people reported achieving their "five a day" of fruit and vegetables, and 60% of adults had excess weight³. More and more individuals and families are struggling to make ends meet, and the average family is often choosing unhealthy options for a variety of reasons⁴. Cooking from scratch can be the cheapest and healthiest way for people to get the food they need⁵, but many people report a lack of cooking skills and the confidence to cook⁶. This is why cooking groups are so important in helping people to create positive and lasting changes in their eating habits and those of their households, families and communities.

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook helps you to ensure your sessions are valuable for everyone, including:

- individuals and families on a low income – supporting them to stretch their food budgets so they can cook healthy meals at home,
- people who speak English as a second or other language,
- older people, who might need to consider health issues and portion sizes,

Good Food For All

Good Food Oxford works towards a food system where all people in Oxfordshire are able to eat well every day by:

- Making healthy food options more easily available;
- Supporting facilitators to offer cooking skills workshops which focus on how to cook healthy and affordable meals that are sustainable for the planet;
- Connecting people with the food assistance they need;
- Training frontline service providers in how they can address food poverty;
- Monitoring the usage levels of crisis food provision;

Developing a **Food Poverty Action Plan** for Oxford to enable us all to help solve the food access problem.

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

² Gallup (2016).

³ Oxfordshire County Council Public Health, Health Indicators (2017).

⁴ Food Foundation, Force Fed (2016).

⁵ Hartman et al (2013), Importance of cooking skills for balanced food choices, *Appetite*, 65, pp 125-131.

⁶ Lacombe (2013), Social health and nutrition impacts of community kitchens: a systematic review, *Public Health Nutrition*, 16(3), pp 535-543.



- people with physical disabilities or mental health issues.

Participants in your sessions will learn to shop smarter, use nutrition information to make healthier choices, and cook delicious, affordable meals. Then, using the resources included for evaluation, you'll be able to track participants' progress. This handbook and the Good Food Cooking Sessions Scorecard will help with your eligibility for grant funding, to report back to funders, and strengthen your partnership working. With a few quick questionnaires, you will be able to demonstrate the value of your sessions, reflect on and develop your facilitation skills, and provide evidence of your own professional development.

We hope that you find this guide useful as you plan and carry out your sessions. Thank you for sharing your skills with the individuals in your community and for your commitment to ensuring that people are able to choose the healthy food they need to thrive. The Good Food Cooking Skills Handbook is supported by Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health Team. If you use it to help plan your sessions you can state that the methodology is verified for health, affordability and sustainability.

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Healthy, affordable and sustainable: finding the balance

The key to successful good food cooking skills sessions is to strike a balance between activities and foods that are healthy, affordable and sustainable. For each of these topics, we provide further guidance on what to include in your cooking sessions in this chapter.

The Good Food Cooking Sessions Scorecard

The Good Food Cooking Sessions Scorecard is a checklist designed to help you plan your sessions with this balance in mind.

We developed a scorecard to help you test the balance of healthy, affordable and sustainable food messages in your course and session plans. We recommend that you use the scorecard to check your session and course plans and aim for at least 20 points across the topics of food knowledge, key skills, catering knowledge and specialist knowledge.

Resources tip

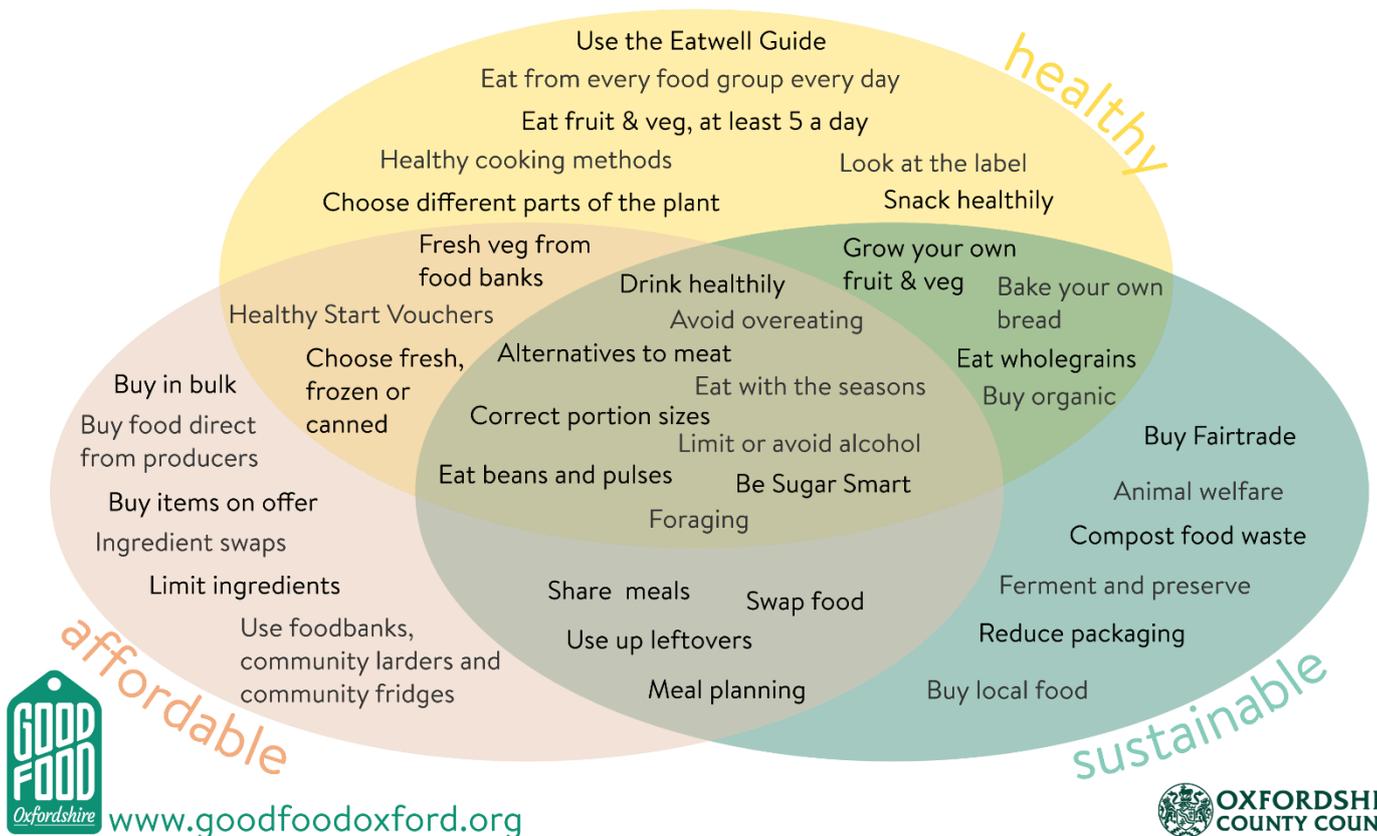


Find the cooking sessions scorecard in the resources section or download an interactive version at www.goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

There is also an A4 printable version of the below diagram in the resources section.

Finding the balance

... between healthy, affordable and sustainable foods and activities



Making good food healthy

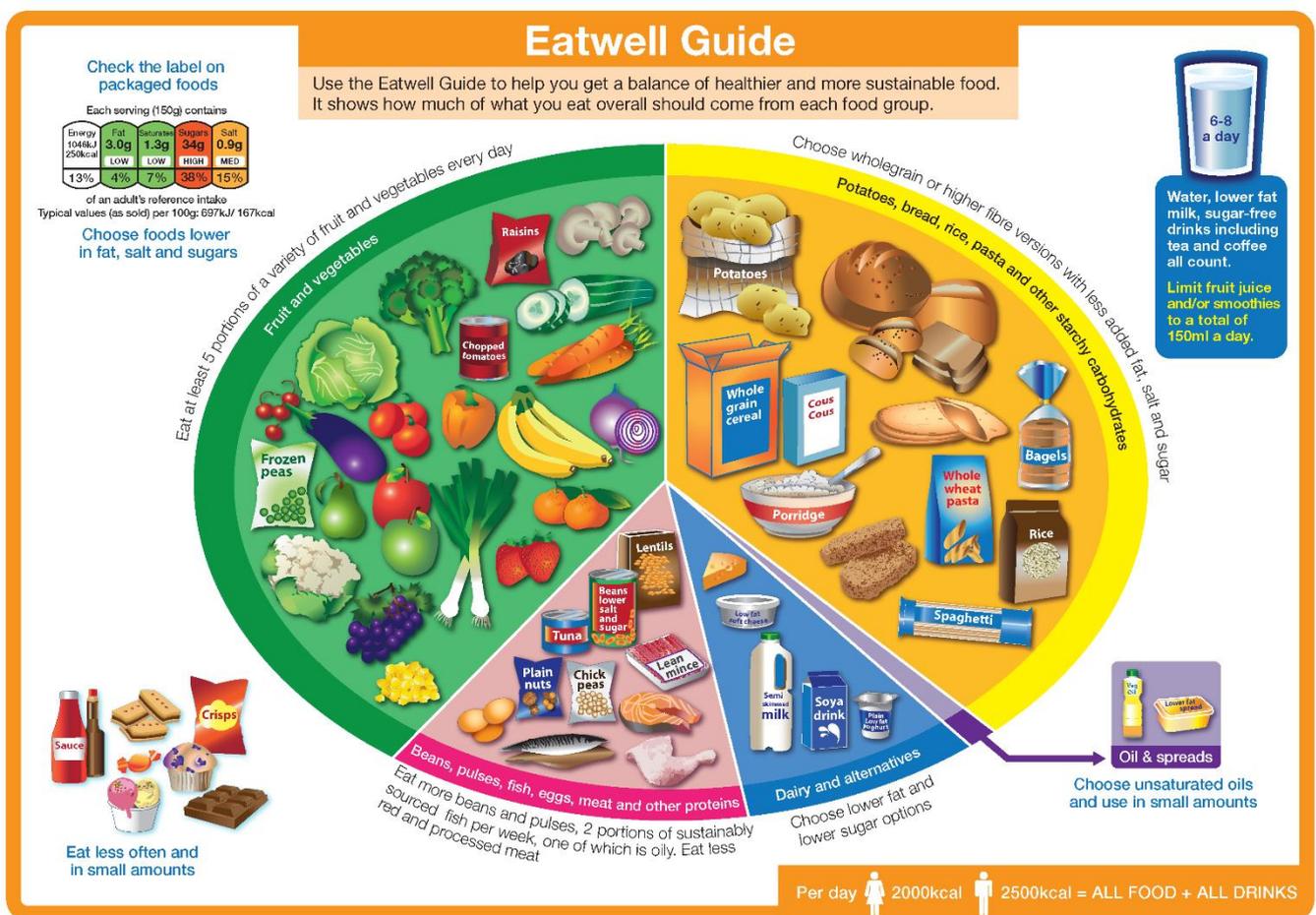
Most people don't need a lot of complex, scientific information about food. They eat certain foods because they like them, and having the opportunity to taste new foods helps people learn to like a wider variety of healthy foods.

In keeping with the way most people learn about food, the nutrition messages included here are deliberately simple and easy to understand (on pages 10-15). Session leaders may wish to review the basics of these messages in order to feel confident answering questions or reinforcing messages in a variety of ways.

For those who want to know more, we recommend checking out the resources and information available on the Change 4 Life website, NHS Choices website, and One You website.

There are also some excellent resources available to borrow for free from the Public Health Promotion Unit including an Eatwell Guide floor mat, handy portion sizer, and resources for a Sugar Game, as well as alcohol-related resources.

Be careful of being perceived to be judging people for not being healthy. Be aware and sensitive, non-judgemental, and help people to feel comfortable and safe as they explore these messages. Remember that people will have habits around what they eat and may be quite sensitive to change. Be encouraging and positive, and help quieter members of a group to join in by asking open questions.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland. © Crown copyright 2016

Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide is the current nutrition guideline (2016) used by Public Health England. It shows the recommended daily proportions of the different food groups, and can be useful to start discussions around eating habits and preferences. A plant-based version developed by Made in Hackney is included in the resources section.

Most people know the basics of the food groups already. It's not necessary to go into detail about each group. Instead, using the Eatwell Guide:



Resources tip

An A4 printable version of the Eatwell Guide and a plant-based version developed by Made in Hackney are included in the resources section.

- Ensure the recipes you cook contain a balance of the different food groups.
- Emphasise that people should be eating from each food group every day, in the proportions recommended.
- Talk about unhealthy snacks and why they are outside of the plate.
- When making healthy snacks, choose foods from at least two food groups.
- Drink water, reduce fat consumption and choose sugar-free drinks.

The 5 food groups

- fruit & vegetables (at least five portions a day)
- carbohydrates (potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, ideally wholegrain and fibrous)
- proteins (beans, pulses, nuts, seeds, eggs, fish, meat)
- dairy and alternatives
- oils & spreads

Eat from every food group, every day

- All food groups provide important nutrients that help us live active, healthy lives.
- No single food group can provide everything we need to be healthy, so it's important to eat from all food groups.
- How we can eat foods from all food groups every day.

Reinforce this message by **choosing recipes that use at least three food groups** and talking about ways to get more fruits and vegetables at meal and snack times.

Correct portion sizes

There are some great images online which give a "handy" guide to portion sizes. These infographics use the hand to show people what a portion size looks like. So for example:

- A portion of protein should be the size of your palm.
- A portion of carbohydrates should be the size of your fist.
- A portion of vegetables should be the size of a cupped hand.

This is important because, according to the British Heart Foundation, **portion sizes have increased by about 50% in the last 20 years**⁷.

Avoid overeating

Most people eat one third more than they need to. One way to address this is only eating until you are 80% full – see if you can model this in your sessions. Another way is to ensure all meals contain foods with a low calorie density and high in fibre, such as vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

Five a day

Eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day will enable people to get the nutrients they need, and will also ensure they don't fill up on "empty calories" from food such as crisps and biscuits. It's important to stress that eating five of the same fruit or vegetables is not as beneficial as eating five different portions of

⁷ See: www.bhf.org.uk/publications/policy-documents/portion-distortion-report-2013

fruit and vegetables – **variety is key**. There is some excellent further information on this as part of the NHS Choices Live Well information⁸.

Choose wholegrains

Wholegrains include wholemeal bread, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur wheat, millet, oatmeal, popcorn, wholewheat pasta and wholegrain crackers.

Wholegrains are particularly good for our health. Use simple analogies that will help the participants understand the importance of choosing wholegrains. For instance, wholegrains are like a broom that sweeps through the body and removes the “bad stuff,” just like a broom removes dirt from a house. It’s also appropriate to teach your group how to identify wholegrain foods. The trick is simple — look at the first ingredient in the ingredients list. If the first ingredient is a wholegrain (like wholemeal flour, wholegrain oats, brown rice, or bulgur), then the food is a wholegrain.

Most importantly, let your participants taste how delicious wholegrains can be! Many people have very little experience with wholegrains — you can open up a whole new world of tastes by exploring these foods.

Talking points:

- Wholegrains are called “whole” because they contain the entire kernel of a grain.
- Refined grains are called “refined” because during processing, parts of the kernel are removed. The parts that are removed contain important vitamins and nutrients.
- “Enriched” grains add back in only some of the vitamins and nutrients; they do not contain the entire grain kernel and are not wholegrains.

Drink plenty of fluids

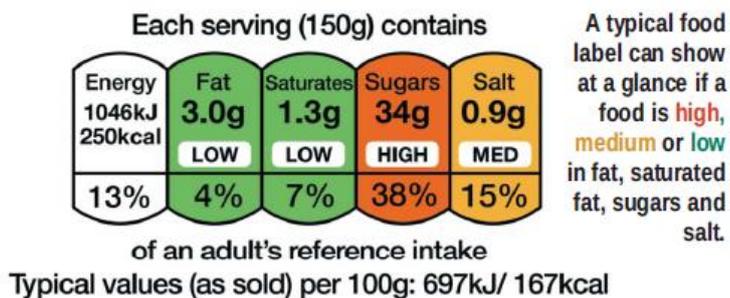
It’s recommended to drink six to eight glasses a day. Water, milk, sugar-free drinks including tea, coffee and herbal tea all count. Limit fruit juice and smoothies, as they contain too much fruit sugar without any good fibre.

Look at the label

Food labels may seem complicated, but simple messages about comparing labels are fairly easy to understand. Check the “traffic light system” on the side of some packets to see whether they are healthy, average or unhealthy. Look out for sugars, salt and saturated fats.

Take along some food packages and start a conversation:

- Ask participants how much they would typically eat or drink. People may not want to share this information – be sensitive!
- Ask people to guess how many portions the package contains. People often do not realise that a single package or bottle can actually contain multiple portions.
- Show the group the amount in one portion. You could do this by weighing out 28g of crisps. Then show the amount in the whole packet.
- If there are two portions within the packet and people say they would eat it all, then everything on the label must be multiplied by two to give you the nutrition facts for the amount they would eat.
- Compare labels for different foods and drinks to find out which one has lower amounts of less desirable nutrients (such as sugar, salt and saturated fat).



⁸ See: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/5ADAY/Pages/5ADAYhome.aspx

- Use empty packets so participants don't ask to eat the contents!
- You may wish to focus on a single nutrient, such as sugar for drinks. Ask the participants to compare the amounts of sugar in a number of different soft drinks. Ask the group to line up the drinks from the lowest to the highest sugar content. Include water, fizzy drinks, still juices, milkshakes and milk in the lineup. It can be useful to compare the sugar per 100ml, and then consider the pack size afterwards. This activity is called the Sugar Game and can be borrowed as a kit from Good Food Oxford and some District Councils.

Be Sugar Smart

Drinks high in sugar are some of the worst culprits for making sure people get far too much sugar in one go – you will discover this with the previous activity. Even fruit juices should be drunk in moderation – it is recommended to have a maximum of 150ml per day, with meals.

- Squeeze an orange and point out how much juice comes out of an orange compared to what is in a glass of juice. Ask how many oranges it would take to fill up the glass. Could you eat this many? Why or why not?
- Explain that the fibre in whole fruit makes you feel fuller than drinking juice. Point out that while fruit and juice both contain important nutrients, the whole fruit is the better choice because it gives us the fibre we need and has fewer calories than juice.
- Point out that a good rule of thumb is to drink no more than one 150ml glass of fruit juice per day.
- Show participants how to check the label to be sure they are buying only 100% juice – with no added sugar.
- Show participants how to add fizz and cut calories by diluting half fruit juice with half fizzy water.

In your sessions, emphasise that **water is the healthiest, cheapest and most refreshing form of drink**, as well as cutting down on packaging waste. Lead by example – drink water and provide glasses of water for your participants to drink. Diet drinks are not a long-term substitute as they still encourage us to want the sugary taste. Check out the national SUGAR SMART resources for more hints and tips. A good place to start is their website:

www.sugarsmartuk.org



Healthy cooking methods

- Use healthy cooking methods: bake, grill, or steam vegetables instead of frying.
- Try out different ways to cook. Decide which work best for you!
- Low salt: if you use canned ingredients, choose ones that are low in salt or have no salt added whenever possible. Flavour with spices and herbs instead of salt. Salt is a contentious issue for some facilitators – but stand firm!
- Low saturated fat: Use vegetable oil instead of butter or margarine. Choose leaner cuts of meat, or use non-meat proteins.

Cooking vegetables healthily

On the Hob	In the Oven	Microwave
<p>Cut food into pieces about the same size.</p> <p>Fill pot with 1½ inches of water, or use a steamer.</p> <p>Simmer or steam until tender.</p>	<p>Preheat the oven to 200°C.</p> <p>Cut food into pieces about the same size.</p> <p>Coat a baking sheet with a little oil.</p> <p>Spread out veggies in a single layer.</p> <p>Bake for 20 minutes, or until food begins to brown at the edges.</p>	<p>Cut food into pieces about the same size.</p> <p>Place in a microwave-safe dish.</p> <p>Add a small amount of water.</p> <p>Cover with a lid.</p> <p>Cook until tender, about 4-6 minutes.</p>

Cooking wholegrains

Wholegrains cook differently compared to refined grains. To know how much water and time each wholegrain needs use this chart:

To cook 1 cup of this wholegrain:	Use this much water (or broth):	Cook for this long:	Total food when cooked:
Whole barley	3 cups	1½ hours	4 cups
Brown rice	2 cups	45 minutes	3 cups
Wholewheat couscous	1½ cups boiling liquid	5 minutes	2½ cups
Quick oats	3 cups	5 minutes	1¾ cups
Wholewheat pasta	4 cups	7-10 minutes	2½ cups
Quinoa (rinse well)	2 cups	15 minutes	4 cups
Wild rice	3 cups	45-60 minutes	2 cups

When using wholegrains, it is best to soak, sprout or ferment them before eating, so for instance soaking brown rice overnight or using wholegrain flour in sourdough bread. This helps to reduce cooking time and thus saves energy, makes the whole grains more digestible and increases nutrient availability. Using a pressure cooker saves even more energy and reduces cooking time.

Use a slow cooker

A slow cooker brings out the flavour in foods. It helps tenderise less-expensive cuts of meat. And you can use less meat to get a meaty flavour, which means you can bulk up a dish with vegetables. There is very little preparation time and it uses less electricity than an oven.

One facilitator runs a slow cooker course, encouraging participants to take lots of photos and provide lots of feedback. There isn't a lot of content (chop, pop it in the cooker and leave it), and there is lots of time for other activities and/or chatting.

Make room for fruit & vegetables

There are many ways to add fruit and vegetables into our diets; even when they are past their best. They're perfect for soups, stews, desserts or smoothies.

- Add vegetables to soups, stews, casseroles, pastas, sauces, or omelettes.
- Combine vegetables and a little salad dressing for a side dish or snack.
- Combine fruits in a fruit salad. Or make a tasty fruit dessert.
- Top cereal with sliced fruit.
- Chop and store fresh fruits in the freezer. Use for smoothies.
- Use overripe produce in low-sugar muffins, breads, or to top pancakes.

Choose different parts of the plant

Your participants may not be aware of the huge variety of fruits and vegetables that are available and the differences between them. One way of highlighting this variety and making it memorable could be by categorising fruits and vegetables in terms of which part of the plant they are. For example:

Flowers	Fruit	Leaves	Roots	Seeds	Stems
Broccoli	Apples	Basil	Beetroots	Black beans	Asparagus
Cauliflower	Aubergine	Brussels sprouts	Carrots	Butter beans	Bamboo shoots
Nasturtium	Avocados	Parsley	Cassava	Chick peas	Broccoli
Violets	Bananas	Cabbages	Garlic	Dry split peas	Celery
	Berries	Cauliflower	Onions	Kidney beans	Pak choi
	Cucumbers	Chard	Parsnips	Lentils	Rhubarb
	Dates	Fenugreek	Potatoes	Nuts	
	Grapefruit	Lettuces	Radishes	Okra	
	Grapes	Mustard	Swedes	Pumpkin seeds	
	Melons	Kale	Sweet potatoes	Peas	
	Oranges	Radish	Turmeric	Sweetcorn	
	Peppers	Rocket		Sunflower seeds	
	Plantain	Spinach			
	Plums	Spring greens			
	Pumpkins	Watercress			
	Squashes				
	Strawberries				
	Tomatoes				

Fresh, frozen and canned

Enjoy fruits and vegetables in all their forms. There is not a “best” form of fruits and vegetables. Each has its pros and cons:

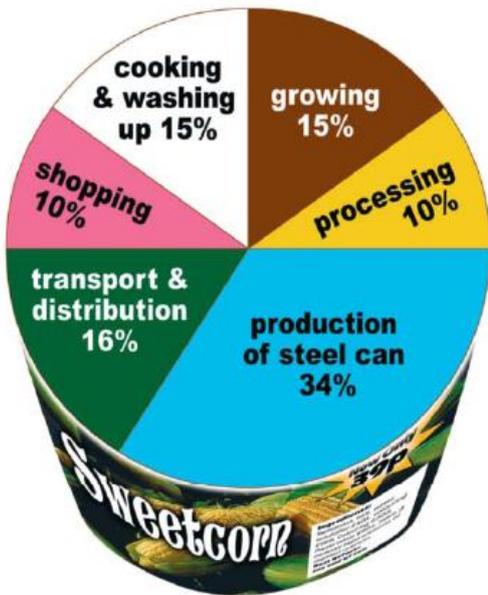
	Pros	Cons	Tips
Fresh	Greater variety Touch, smell, and see before buying Can cost less if in season Probably travelled less far	Use soon before it goes off Need to learn about ripeness and storage Can cost more if not in season	Purchase fresh produce when in season to save money Ask at the shop how to select or store unfamiliar produce
Frozen	Probably frozen at peak freshness Can cost less Long shelf life (up to 6 months) Little preparation required Available year-round	May have added salt, sugar, and/or fat Texture changes with freezing May have added salt, sugar, and / or fat Often packaged in plastic Requires frozen transport & storage	Choose frozen fruits or vegetables with no salt sugar or fat added Store at 0°C or lower to prevent nutrient loss

Canned at peak freshness
Can cost less Long shelf life (2–4 years)
Little preparation required
Available year-round

Canning requires a lot of energy, resources and waste
Texture changes with canning
Recycling of cans uses a lot of energy

Choose canned vegetables low in salt and fat
Choose fruit canned in juice
Rinse off canned vegetables before using to reduce salt

Energy inputs (from farm to plate) for a can of sweetcorn



Source: based on David Pimental and Marcia Pimental Eds. *Food, Energy and Society* (1996) University Press of Colorado.

Water: the magic ingredient

These are some of the amazing things water can be used for in cooking:

- Pour into your pan to release the crusted-on flavours. It's cheaper than using stock!
- Thin out an over-reduced sauce.
- Rinse off your knife between uses.
- Add a small amount to a pan and use to steam veggies.
- Quench your thirst while cooking.
- Control calories by drinking water.

These magical steps will help your participants really get the most out of the food that is available to them and may even enable them to buy better quality ingredients if they are saving money on other things.

Snack healthily

Choose healthy snacks between meals.

- Make snacks using foods from at least two food groups.
- Go for the food groups you haven't eaten yet that day.
- Eat snacks 2-3 hours before meal time.
- Keep portions small.
- Check Nutrition Information on the food package including the red/orange/green traffic light system. Avoid snacks high in fat, sugar, or salt.
- Plan ahead so you always have healthy, tasty snacks on hand.

Drinking healthily

We need to drink plenty of fluids to stop us getting dehydrated – it is recommended to drink 6-8 glasses every day, which is 1.2 litres. This is in addition to the fluid we get from the food we eat. All non-alcoholic drinks count, but water, milk and milk alternatives are healthier choices.

Drink water

Try adding fresh fruit slices or mint leaves to add some zingy flavour. Sparkling water could be more interesting for some people than tap water.

Drink juice with no added sugar

Fruit juice can provide important nutrients but is high in fruit sugar and calories. Try to drink juice only at mealtimes to reduce tooth decay and ensure you don't drink too much of it without feeling full. Check the label to make sure it doesn't have any added sugar.

Cut the fruit sugar in half – mix with sparkling water to make a fizzy drink. Drink no more than 150ml of juice a day. The best form of the juice is the whole fruit as it contains fibre which helps you feel full. Limit or avoid sugary drinks – sugary drinks are packed with calories with little nutrition.



Instead of...

Soft Drinks

Try this:

Combine juice (with no added sugar) and sparkling water to make your own healthy fizzy drinks with less sugar and fewer calories.

Fruit-Flavoured Drinks

Choose juice (with no added sugar). Or flavour tap water with fresh fruit slices or mint leaves. Be aware that if you add fruit to water, it can make the water acidic, which is not good for teeth.

Sports or Energy Drinks

Replace the fluids you lose being active with water with a pinch of salt.

Limit or avoid alcohol

Over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious problems including: high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems. Alcohol is linked to some cancers.

The calories from alcohol also count towards our daily limit and excess calories can lead to obesity and risk of other diseases including diabetes.

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, if you drink most weeks:

- **Men and women are advised not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis.** Fourteen units is equivalent to seven pints of average-strength (4%) beer or seven 175ml glasses of average-strength (12%) wine.
- Spread your drinking over three or more days if you regularly drink as much as 14 units a week.
- If you want to cut down, try to have several drink-free days each week, or drink alcohol just at the weekend.



Making good food affordable

It's important to choose foods and activities based on their accessibility and affordability for individuals and families on a low income. Some participants may be receiving food assistance such as Healthy Start Vouchers and/or statutory benefits. Making low-cost recipes with basic ingredients will show them that it's possible to eat healthy, tasty food while stretching their food resources at the same time.

When I feed the hungry, they call me a saint. When I ask why people are hungry, they call me a communist.

Archbishop Dom Helder Camara, 1995

Buy items on offer

Being creative whilst shopping means you can pick up healthy food at a lower cost. Encourage your participants to shop for reduced items and share the skills needed to make the most of them – for example looking up recipes online using a few key ingredients. If they have a freezer, buying reduced items to freeze can be a great money saver.

Buy direct

When you buy direct from a market stall, food can be cheaper. This is because markets have lower overheads than supermarkets, you cut out the middleman, and more of the value of the food goes direct to the farmer who grew it. If you buy from markets, you can also buy exactly the amount you need which works out cheaper.

Buy in bulk

Bulk buying staples such as rice, lentils, oats and pasta can work out a lot cheaper than buying smaller packets. Plus store cupboard goods have a long shelf life and so they are less likely to be wasted. For many people this initial outlay is too much, so encourage your participants to club together with friends or neighbours to share the cost and the produce. Infinity Foods and Essential Foods deliver in bulk.

Share meals and swap food

Cooking and eating for others saves time and fuel compared to everyone cooking for themselves. Encourage your participants to attend community meals, which can be very affordable, and cook for family and friends in bulk.

It can be difficult to work out exactly how much fresh food you need, and if you have too much it can easily go to waste. Better to swap and share with neighbours rather than let this happen. The same is true of allotment produce. Olio is an app to help people to do this.

Ingredient swaps

Can a less expensive ingredient be used? For example, use chicken pieces instead of chicken breasts. For recipes that call for oil, use vegetable oil instead of olive oil, which is typically more expensive. You may want to bring price comparisons into your sessions – a great way to talk about budgeting and support skills in Maths.

Choose dried spices instead of fresh. Dried spices are typically cheaper and more shelf-stable. If you'd like, suggest fresh alternatives in the chef's notes of the recipe.

Choose foods that can be used in different meals and snacks. If the ingredient is only used in a very small quantity in the recipe (such as many spices) and would not be useful for many other dishes, leave it out or suggest a more common alternative.

Choose unbranded or store own-brand ingredients. This allows people to not identify with the brand, and therefore allows flexibility in purchasing.



Meal planning

Encourage your participants to plan their meals in advance to make them less expensive. It is a real skill learning how to buy reduced items and incorporate them into dishes. If they have the facilities, batch cooking and freezing saves time and money. Choose ingredients in their most whole form e.g. whole carrots instead of baby carrots, a block of cheese instead of grated cheese, and whole broccoli instead of florets.

Grow your own food

It's a great way to save money, and it can be fun and creative too. It will require some time and effort. Start small with herbs on the kitchen windowsill. Harvest at Home give out free grow kits to households in Oxfordshire to get started with growing their own vegetables.

Bake your own bread

This is a fantastic skill to learn and also works out far cheaper than shop bought bread of a similar quality. It's healthier because it doesn't use the raising agents and preservatives present in shop bought bread, and can be less resource intensive if using your oven for making multiple things at a time. Try adding nuts, seeds, sun-dried tomatoes and other treats to your bread. Try breads from different cultures like flatbreads, soda-bread or sourdough.

Limit ingredients

In addition, try to limit the number of ingredients to no more than 8–10 per recipe to keep costs down. This also helps participants find the recipes more accessible.

Healthy Start Vouchers

This is a national government scheme which provides people on benefits who have children or anyone who is pregnant under 18 with weekly vouchers for fruit, vegetables and milk. Referrals are from midwives and health visitors. Make sure your participants know about the vouchers and where they can be redeemed.

Food banks and community food services

Community food services such as food banks, community larders and community fridges serve a dual purpose of redistributing surplus food that would otherwise have gone to waste and making this food available for free or at subsidized rates to those in need.

Food banks can operate via referral or be open access. Some food banks provide fresh vegetables every week which means participants can get a much-needed top up of their grocery shopping. Others provide a parcel of emergency food in a crisis but it is still important to be able to cook this food into tasty nutritious meals.

If you use food bank ingredients, treat them as you would any leftovers – encourage participants to get creative with ingredients and use the internet to find suitable recipes if needed.

Live Well Oxfordshire provides information on food banks at livewell.oxfordshire.gov.uk and you can find community services across Oxfordshire at www.goodfoodoxford.org/foodmap. Good Food Oxford has published a Food Insecurity Toolkit to help you have conversations about food insecurity and food access.

Resources tip

Find a list of useful links and service providers for referring and signposting in the resources section.

The Food Insecurity Toolkit can be downloaded at www.goodfoodoxford.org.



What is food insecurity?

FOOD INSECURITY

Reasons for food insecurity — food poverty trap

Having conversations about food

LISTEN, REFLECT BACK, START WITH OPEN QUESTIONS

CONVERSATION TIPS

MORE OPEN QUESTIONS

ASSISTING

SIGNPOSTING



Making good food sustainable

Health and sustainability are often quite closely mapped on to each other, so if you are encouraging your participants to eat healthily, they will also be eating in a way that is better for the planet too. Some money-saving tips for sustainability do take a little more time, but some are about learning tips and tricks for better resource management.

Alternatives to meat

Choosing protein-rich alternatives to meat, on three to four days a week, even if you are not vegetarian, is healthier and far better for the planet. Most traditional national dishes contain the perfect balance of protein (e.g. rice and lentils, tortilla wrap and beans, oats and barley, potatoes and vegetables).

Swap meat for protein-rich beans, legumes, lentils, nuts, tofu, tempeh, oats or barley. Gram for gram in terms of protein, this is also far cheaper than meat. Offer participants the opportunity to cook with and taste these alternatives.

Eat beans and pulses

Beans, lentils and peas are a cheap, low-fat source of protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals, and they count as one of your recommended five daily portions of fruit and vegetables. Some examples include:

- baked beans
- red, green, yellow and brown lentils
- chickpeas (chana or garbanzo beans)
- garden peas
- black-eyed peas
- runner beans
- broad beans (fava beans)
- kidney beans, butter beans (Lima beans), haricots, cannellini beans, flageolet beans, pinto beans and borlotti beans

Eat with the seasons

Eating food that is not in season means you are buying food that has either come a long way or was grown in greenhouses, or both. Either way this means a lot more energy was used to make that food. Local food in season can be cheaper than imported food out of season, especially if you are willing to experiment with the less glamorous vegetables such as swedes, turnips and kale. Locally grown food can also be fresher which means it lasts longer and therefore is less likely to go to waste. Emphasise with your participants what season we are in, and try and pick up some seasonal ingredients which you have got at an affordable price.

Use up leftovers

Make sure you refrigerate or freeze leftovers, help your participants understand what can be refrigerated or frozen, and also how to understand Best Before (a guideline for quality) and Use By Dates (an indicator of safety). Run sessions which enable participants to be happier making up recipes from what they find in the fridge. That could be a “Ready Steady Cook” style session where you provide certain leftover ingredients and participants have to search for a suitable recipe online. Many supermarkets now give their surplus food away to charities and community groups, including Oxford Food Hub (formerly Oxford Food Bank) and SOFEA or Fareshare.

There is a really fantastic movement in Oxfordshire to use up food that would otherwise go to waste. By explaining that it’s going for incineration and it’s perfectly good food, you can help to instil pride in using surplus food, rather than shame.

Approximately 7 million tonnes of food and drink is wasted in the UK each year. This costs the average family over £400.

Food Standards Agency
www.food.gov.uk



The Love Food Hate Waste website (www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/recipes) has lots recipes, resources and tips and Replenish Oxfordshire (www.replenishoxfordshire.com) publish a regular newsletter with tips on reducing food waste, composting and growing food. You can also get a Replenish volunteer to come and run a food waste workshop during your cooking sessions.

The annual Oxfordshire Pumpkin Festival (www.goodfoodoxford.org/oxfordshire-pumpkin-festival) celebrates edible pumpkins and squashes and encourages everyone to eat – rather than carve and bin – their pumpkins.

Grow your own fruit & veg

The cheapest vegetables are those you grow yourself, and vegetables can even be grown from the discarded carrot tops and potato eyes of the ingredients you are using. This may be time-intensive but it doesn't necessarily have to be. Maybe your participants can grow some veggies together, or simply start with a grow bag of tomatoes, or a window box of herbs or lettuces. This is one way to get organic produce at a reduced price.

Know the local area – there may be a community growing project at the premises where you are running the sessions, or a community allotment nearby. Community initiatives are a fantastic way to get involved with food growing, as there is often an expert volunteer on hand to help everyone to learn and grow the best produce. Many projects allow people to take a free harvest away with them at the end of the session, which is a brilliant way to boost your vegetable supply.

See if you can link your cooking session to a local growing project, by running your session in the same place and time, and/or using produce grown by that group. For those who want to take their growing to the next stage, encourage them to start an allotment – they may want to club together to make the space more manageable. To find a list of local allotment sites contact your local council.

Fairtrade

Buying food which pays a fair wage to producers is vital to ensure their future livelihoods and the sustainability of the food system. Try and encourage your participants to discuss the importance of a fair wage locally and internationally. Coffee, tea, bananas and chocolate are a good starting point.

Ferment and preserve

If you have leftovers - whether from shopping for bargains, growing your own or food surplus - it can be great to ferment or preserve food for later. Jam and chutney making are more familiar, but they do tend to use a lot of sugar. Fermenting can be fascinating and create some delicious traditional foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, miso and kefir. Support and encourage your participants to have a go and do a taste test.

Animal welfare

High welfare foods such as organic, free range and pasture-fed are better for the animals involved which in turn is better for the planet. Discuss the difference in price and whether participants think it is worth it.

Local food

Choosing locally-grown food means less energy is needed to transport, package, refrigerate and distribute the food – you are lowering the 'carbon footprint' of your diet. Foods from far away come with 'food miles'. It has been estimated that for every calorie of 'fresh' carrot flown into the UK from South Africa about 22 calories are used just to bring it here. This is a very inefficient use of energy! Britain currently imports more than half of its food. Local food may also get to you fresher, which means it is less likely to spoil and go to waste.



Foraging

With a little bit of training, foraging is the ultimate low-effort food for free. Emphasise that people should never eat anything unless they have a proper identification, as some of the most poisonous wild plants look similar to edible ones.

As a starting point, try nettles as they are easy to identify and abundantly available. Wear gloves. Find nettles which are higher than waist height as they are less likely to be dirty. Pick the early spring tops of the nettles – just the first couple of new leaves. Make into nettle soup with onions and potatoes – add the nettles towards the very end. There are some good recipes online.

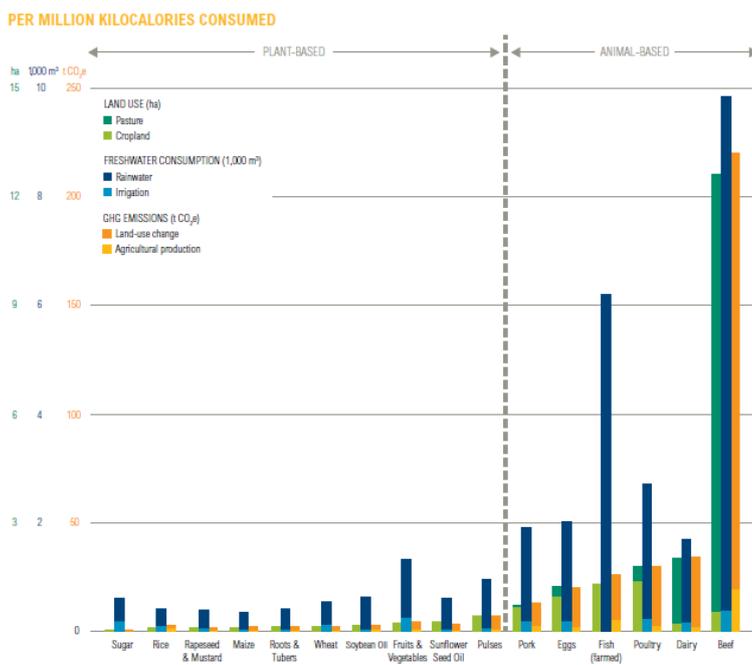
Blackberries are also a very safe option as long as you find patches which are away from road pollution.

Joining a local Abundance group is a fantastic way to build foraging confidence and skills. There is an active group in Oxford, Abundance Oxford, as well as an Oxford Wild Food Map: www.oxfordwildfood.wordpress.com

Other similar initiatives taking place around Oxfordshire can be found on the Community Action Groups website: www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk

Eating plants vs animals

Producing animal-based foods generally has a bigger negative impact on the planet than plant-based foods. This bar chart shows how much land (green bars) and water (blue bars) are used to produce different types of food. Also shown are the amount of greenhouse gas emissions (orange bars).



A diet based on plants uses much less water, land and other resources than a meat eaters' diet. To raise an animal for eating we need a lot of land, food and water for that animal. In many poor countries forests are replaced with cropland principally to grow food for animals. This 'land-use change' destroys habitats for wild animals and local people. Approximately half of all the food crops grown in the world are fed to animals. Almost a billion people in the world are hungry everyday – partly because so much of that local food is fed to livestock.

Many people choose to eat less meat for health, ethical and / or environmental reasons. Over 10% of people in the UK are vegetarian while about 5% are vegan (eating no animal products). For more info see: www.vegsoc.org & www.vegansociety.com

Sources: GlobAgri model (land use and greenhouse gas emissions), authors' calculations from Melkonian and Hoekstra (2011, 2012) (freshwater consumption), and Waite et al. (2014) (farmed fish freshwater consumption).

Source: www.wri.org/shiftingdiets



Compost food waste

In line with the food waste hierarchy, teach participants how to compost food waste if it can't be eaten or preserved for later. Wormeries can even work indoors. Replenish Oxfordshire offer workshops on composting and growing food.



Organic

Cutting out pesticide use, herbicides, chemical fertilisers and antibiotics is better for our health, the health of the animals on our farms and the planet. Pesticides have been shown to harm bees, other insects and birds. Organic cultivation methods protect soils, sequester more carbon in the soil and promote biodiversity.

Organic can be affordable if you choose local food which is in season, or grow it yourself. Organic food has less need to be peeled as there are no chemicals on the skin, so choosing organic vegetables and fruit can mean less goes to waste. At the same time, peeling non-organic vegetables does not ensure that it is free from potentially harmful chemicals.

For more info see: www.soilassociation.org/whatisorganic

Organic farming has significant potential to help tackle climate change. If all UK farmland was converted to organic farming, at least 1.3 million tonnes of carbon would be taken up by the soil each year – the equivalent of taking nearly 1 million cars off the road.

Soil Association
www.soilassociation.org

Reduce packaging

So much supermarket food is plastic wrapped - this waste sometimes ends up in nature, in rivers and then oceans. Some fruit and vegetables come with their own natural packaging, such as bananas.

Encourage your participants to discuss packaging. You could talk about ways to reduce packaging, for example get a veg-box, use refillable containers, pick your own veg from greengrocers or farmers markets, and bring your own bag when shopping.

Communicating values

Sustainability can be a distant or overwhelming idea which it is difficult to relate to at the best of times. Here are some ways of incorporating positive messages about sustainability without resorting to lecturing or jargon. Being a more responsible citizen can be a useful message on some issues which have had a lot of publicity (for example plastic reduction and our oceans).

In other cases, a good tactic is to relate the issue to personal values, empathy, or causes and effects close to home (e.g. the local bee population and pesticides).

You can also use messages about “co-benefits” which add to the power of what you are communicating – that some actions are good for your wallet, your health and the planet. Examples include: alternatives to meat, reducing food waste. Some facilitators recommend dropping the messages about sustainability in alongside other benefits which are more immediate for people. Role models are important – are “people like me” or people I admire doing this? Once people are taking positive action, it is easier for them to identify with that positive action and own it as a part of their character. You can help by communicating positive actions in a straightforward way and by offering practical achievable steps.

Think of the group

Keep in mind where participants shop. If an ingredient is generally not found in a mainstream supermarket in your area, it may not be a good choice. However, if participants commonly use a local specialist food shop, some less commonly available or otherwise expensive items may be appropriate for your group. Ask your community about what’s accessible to the majority of the participants. Make sure you pay attention to culturally significant food and include these where appropriate. Participants can learn about these foods from each other, building skills and confidence for everyone.



Key cooking skills

Choose recipes that allow participants to practice core skills. These skills include:

- following a recipe
- using a peeler
- knife skills
- using weighing scales
- using a hob, oven, grill
- steaming
- stir fry
- baking
- roasting
- making a sauce
- making the most of flavours
- making the most of temperature

Ensure your sessions share some of these and enable participants to practice.

Knife skills

Watch your fingers! Make a “claw” (fingers tucked towards the palm) with the hand that is holding the food.

Cut round foods in half. This creates a flat surface so foods will not move when you cut them.

Lead with the tip. The tip of the knife should be angled toward the cutting board.

Slide the knife down and back up like a saw. Don't just push down.

Making the most of flavours

Introduce participants to the five main flavours and ask them to identify each of them while tasting ingredients and the food they cooked. You can talk about how different cuisines use flavour, spices and seasonings differently, and how different cooking methods affect flavour.

Making the most of temperature

Hot pan, cold oil. Always heat your pan over a medium heat before adding fat. When the pan is hot, add a small amount of oil. When the oil is hot, add the food.

Slow and low. The best way to cook foods in liquid is at low temperatures for a long time. For cooking cheaper cuts of meat, stewing and braising break down tough fibres and bring out flavours.

High and fast. A lot of heat for a short amount of time is the best way to seal in flavours without using much fat. Seal in a crust on meat or fish. Stir-fry veggies to keep a nice crunch.

Food hygiene

Follow proper food safety procedures at all times.

- **Aprons:** have enough available for everyone to have one.
- **Hair bands:** bring a few elastic bands so participants can tie their hair back if necessary.
- **Handwashing:** Start by washing your hands thoroughly. Use warm water and soap. Wash for 20 seconds — about the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice. Wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food, and keep raw and ready-to-eat food separate.
- **Temperature controls:** ensure your participants know about frozen (-18 to -1°C), chilled (0 to 4°C), cooking (70°C for two minutes or 75°C +) and the “danger zone” (5 to 63°C).
- **Cross-contamination:** Use separate chopping boards for different types of food or sanitise them between use. This can be done with a sanitising chemical left to work for the correct amount of time as indicated on the bottle, or by immersing in water at or above 82°C. You may want to use the appropriate different

coloured chopping boards – this can help for participants interested in learning more about cooking professionally.

- **Cleaning:** clear and clean as you go. Clear away used equipment and spilt food, and use a green caddy to clear away food waste. Clean work surfaces thoroughly using cleaning products that are suitable for the job, and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Cleaning cloths should be sanitised or heated between uses. Keep records of the products you are using.

How to keep a tidy kitchen setup

- Make sure that your chopping board cannot slip, either with a rubber no-slip mat or a damp cloth.
- If you are right handed, place the things you are chopping on the left hand side of the board, a bowl to use for scraps above your board and another bowl (or more if you're separating the greens, for instance) on the right to put the chopped veg in. This will be far more efficient and mean it will be quicker to tidy up at the end.



Functional skills you can support in cooking sessions

Maths

Cooking sessions are a good way to help your participants improve their Maths skills. Try and include things like:

- calculating weights
- calculating costs of ingredients
- measuring amounts
- estimating calorific content
- cooking times and temperatures
- dealing with money to buy ingredients
- selling cooked products

English

Literacy and English language are also valuable skills which can be supported within cooking sessions. For example:

- reading a recipe in order to make it
- reading dietary guidelines
- writing a list of ingredients
- writing out your favourite recipe
- discussing recipe ideas
- talking, listening and asking questions about the session and activities
- making labels

Your sessions can be a good way to demystify some of the unusual language around cooking. Once participants have had a go at a technique, use plain English to explain cooking terminology (e.g. how about "to sauté"?). Give participants the chance to hear, say and read unusual-sounding ingredients (e.g. aubergine, courgette, okra, hummus).

ICT (Information & Communication Technology)

ICT is also straightforward to embed in cooking sessions, and another key skill for life. Try and include:

- searching the internet to find a recipe with certain key ingredients
- creating a bookmarked folder of recipes on a tablet or laptop
- printing off a recipe or emailing it to someone
- typing up a menu
- taking photos of finished menu items and uploading them to a shared folder
- downloading and using various useful apps such as *Be Food Smart*, *Sugar Smart* and *Olio*



Language barriers

Be aware of language barriers if you are working with migrants and refugees. Remember to slow down if you are working through an interpreter. This can be a great cultural exchange opportunity if you include options to work with food from your participants' native country alongside traditional British food, and share recipes and cooking tips from different cultures.

Cooking with families and kids

Cooking for children

Some of your participants may have children. Healthy diets and good food habits are such an important foundation for future life. You may be able to drop top tips for cooking for children into your sessions:

- appropriate portion sizes for children – using their hand sizes as a guide,
- varied balanced diet as per the Eatwell Guide,
- eat a rainbow – children tend to love this message!
- persevere – children may need to try a food ten times before they get used to it,
- hide extra vegetables in sauces e.g. blend into tomato pasta sauce,
- offer them fruit and vegetables when they are most hungry (e.g. raw carrot sticks as they come home from school).

Help to make children's experiences with food fun and memorable, for example:

- Offer fruits and vegetables at each meal in ways that are fun for children.
- Let children play with their food.
- Ask them to describe the shapes of fruits and veggies.
- Make faces on bread or bagel halves. Spread cream cheese or peanut butter. Use fruits and veggies to make eyes, eyebrows, nose, cheeks, and a smile.
- Let them hold, touch, smell, or just look at foods to explore them — even if they don't eat them.
- Make sure they are the right size for them to hold, and not too big.
- Talk about all the colours.
- Help children learn the names of colours by telling you which ones are on their plate.
- Make a wallchart. Let children put a sticker by each colour they eat that day.
- Connect colours to things children know. Relate red tomatoes to a red toy they like or to Spiderman's red cape.
- Add new flavours.
- Add a small amount of vegetable oil, herbs or some pepper to flavour cooked veggies.
- Serve raw or lightly steamed veggies with a healthy dip.
- Try different cooking methods.
- Children often don't like the mushy look or taste of overcooked vegetables. Lightly steam or sauté veggies just until tender.
- Use fruit in a fruit salad or mixed into a sugar free yoghurt. Try mashing, steaming, baking, or roasting veggies.
- Make a game out of trying new things.
- Get children to taste-test vegetables seasoned with different flavours. Let them vote for the one they like most.
- Make up silly songs about a new fruit or vegetable. Get children to sing them as you show them the new food.

Help for fussy eating

Make space and time for proper meal times at the table, offer small portions so as not to overwhelm your child, be supportive, don't force the issue. Have the leaflet *Fussy Eating* available for participants to take away (you can get this from the **Oxfordshire Public Health Promotion Resource Unit**).

Breastfeeding

Even if you don't know much about breastfeeding, there may be the opportunity to share with expectant or new parents that breastfeeding protects babies from infections and diseases. Have the information available to signpost to local support services if needed.

Cooking with children

It can be great fun for all running cooking sessions for children, as long as you follow a few important guidelines. Here are our suggestions:

- Select activities and recipes that are **appropriate for the age** or maturity level of your group. If you are working with primary school-age children for example, use recipes that require only fingers or simple utensils.
- Devise a **clear session plan** with young children, as it's very easy for them to lose concentration.
- Make sure you get **parental permission** for children to do cooking sessions, and specific permission if you are doing anything dangerous e.g. using heat or practising knife skills. Ensure you have done a full risk assessment of the activities.
- If you can, **run sessions where parents / carers stay** and supervise – this will engage them with the activities and messages too!
- If not, ensure you have a small enough group and **enough helpers** to properly supervise the children.
- You may want to weigh out or **prepare some ingredients in advance**, but try not to bypass useful learning experiences e.g. weighing skills, cracking eggs.
- Try and **encourage children to take the lead**, including tasting lots to encourage enjoyment in cooking and understanding of the process. It's OK if they don't like the taste – it is great that they've had a try. It's an important role to help children attempt something unfamiliar, even if they think they're not going to like it – they might be surprised.
- **Model good food behaviour**, e.g. example raw vegetable crudites with dips.
- You should only be left alone with children if you are properly trained and qualified in childcare, with an **up-to-date DBS** (Disclosure and Barring Service) check which you can renew annually or register online for automatic renewal. Even if you are not going to be alone with children and/or vulnerable adults, you may want to get a DBS check anyway.

There are some wonderful activities you can try with young children to make sure sessions are fun and memorable:

Making fruit faces – provide yogurt for dipping and eating and ask questions like:

- How many different colour fruits did you choose? Which ones?
- Which of the fruits are you most excited to eat?
- Which of the fruits have you never tried before?
- Why is your Fruit Face good for you to eat?

Making vegetable superheroes – provide hummus for dipping and eating and ask questions like:

- What is your superhero's name?
- How many different colour veggies did you choose? Which ones?
- Which of these veggies have you eaten before? Did you enjoy them?
- Is this the first time you are trying any of these veggies? Which ones?

Fruit and vegetable rainbow – make a rainbow shape with fruits or vegetables, then eat it!

Eatwell Guide Game: Guess which flash cards go in which food group.

Sugar Smart Game: Match the different size packets of sugar against the correct drink to guess which contains each amount of sugar. The game is available to borrow from Good Food Oxford and District Councils.

Dustbin diets: bring a (clean) food waste caddy with ingredients for a meal in it, pull each item out and explain why this item tends to go to waste, then help children to cook them into a meal. Get them to design a sign for their food waste caddy at home encouraging their family to use it and waste less food.

Don't forget to drop in tips and information about cooking as a career as well as for fun and for health – perhaps some of these children will be the next professional chefs or kitchen assistants.

Packed lunches

Only 1% of packed lunches in the UK are considered to be healthy⁹, so both children and adults have a lot to learn in terms of making a healthy packed lunch. Use flash cards or real ingredients, plus real lunchboxes, and ask people to pack their perfect packed lunch, choosing from the options available:

- a healthy protein e.g. hummus, refried beans, tuna, egg mayo, ham, hummus
- a healthy carbohydrate e.g. wholegrain bread, pitta bread, baked potato, pasta, rice
- one or two vegetables e.g. carrots, tomato, cucumber, broccoli, sweetcorn
- one or two fruits e.g. apple, banana, orange, strawberries, plums, blueberries
- a dairy item or alternative e.g. cheese, yoghurt, milk
- a drink: see what happens if you only offer milk or water
- a healthy snack e.g. yoghurt, sugar-free flapjack, nuts and dried fruit, popcorn, mini muffin
- Ask children to draw their lunch with coloured felt tips. They can then take the drawing home and stick it to the fridge as a reminder!

There are lots more ideas on the Change4Life website: change4life.co.uk

Cooking for one

Some of your participants may live on their own, and there are some specific skills that you can share to help people cook for one.

- Plan meals.
- Just buy what you need, buy frozen and canned vegetables, buy single portions at the meat/fish counter or the farmer's market.
- Choose simple ingredients.
- Use herbs and spices for interest.
- If you can, cook extra and freeze multiple portions.
- Enjoy yourself!

For older people, there are some simple meals that contain all food groups and can appeal to smaller appetites. For example: sardines or baked beans on toast, a jacket potato with cheese, all served with portions of salad or vegetables. Healthy snacks include plain yoghurt with fruit, peanut butter on crackers, vegetable sticks, avocado, porridge, banana or a handful of nuts. Try to encourage consumption of calcium and magnesium to support bone health. Staying hydrated and eating well can reduce dizziness and falls.

Employment options

Your participants may be taking part in the sessions for all kinds of reasons – to learn new skills, build confidence, meet people, get out of a cooking rut, find out how to save money, and so on. One of the reasons people take part, or maybe a reason they will discover through the sessions, is that learning to cook more confidently can be a route to employment.

Take the opportunity to highlight this and signpost to:

⁹ Food Foundation (2016), Force Fed.



- Foundation Pathway
- Hospitality & Catering
- Food Hygiene Level 2
- Food Allergen Level 2
- Chef's Diploma
- Specialisms e.g. pastry making

Have information to hand about a local college which runs appropriate courses e.g. City of Oxford College, and see if there are any participants in particular that you can support to take this route.

Health Conditions

Be prepared to discuss in very basic terms certain health conditions, and be prepared to refer people to the relevant health services if they seem to need it. Emphasise clearly that one-to-one advice can't be given. Some people may have specialist diets (e.g. for Crohn's disease). Be aware of how to balance the general advice given out with people's own specific preferences, tastes and needs.

Conversations may come around to specific media reports e.g. about drinking a glass of wine a day or eating dark chocolate. However, NHS Choices and NHS Behind the Headlines can be useful to go behind the headlines and give specific advice.

Diabetes: talk about low or zero sugar options.

Heart disease: talk about low or zero fat options.

You might like to let participants know that if they are aged between 40 and 74 they can get a free NHS Health Check from their GP. The check is an opportunity to pick up any health conditions like diabetes or heart problems early.

Allergies and intolerances: It's a good idea for you to know about and be able to discuss the eight main allergens and the 14 that it is now a legal requirement to list. The eight main ones are highlighted in bold in the box below. Ask participants to declare any allergies and do not use these ingredients with the group.



Resources tip

Find a list of useful links and service providers for referring and signposting in the resources section.

Download editable versions at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

Legally required list of allergens

- cereals containing gluten, namely: **wheat** (including spelt and Khorasan wheat), rye, barley
- **shellfish**, crustaceans for example prawns, crabs, lobster, crayfish
- **eggs**
- **fish**
- **peanuts**
- **soya** beans
- **milk**
- **tree nuts**; namely almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecan nuts, Brazil nuts, pistachio nuts, macadamia nuts
- celery (including celeriac)
- mustard
- sesame
- sulphur dioxide/sulphites, where added and at a level above 10mg/kg in the finished product. This can be used as a preservative in dried fruit
- lupin which includes lupin seeds and flour and can be found in types of bread, pastries and pasta
- molluscs like clams, mussels, whelks, oysters, snails and squid

Eating is a social activity

A healthy diet is not just about physical but also about social and emotional aspects around food. Have a conversation about the importance of taking time for meals, cooking and eating together with others and how it's good for mental and physical health.



Talk about mental wellbeing

Eating a healthy diet can do a lot to improve mood and create a sense of wellbeing. Try to bring some of these top tips in to incorporate healthy eating for a good mood. All of the following tips are sourced from the national Mind website.

Eating regularly

If your blood sugar drops you might feel tired, irritable and depressed. You need to eat regularly to keep your sugar level steady and choose foods that release energy slowly. Slow-release energy foods include protein foods, nuts and seeds, oats and wholegrains. Eating breakfast gets the day off to a good start. Instead of eating a large lunch and dinner, try eating smaller portions spaced out more regularly throughout the day.

Avoid foods which make your blood sugar rise and fall rapidly, such as sugary snacks, sugary drinks, and alcohol.



Try to avoid anything which lists 'trans fats' or 'partially hydrogenated oils' in the list of ingredients (such as some shop-bought cakes and biscuits). They can be tempting when you're feeling low, but this kind of fat is bad for your mood and your physical health in the long run.



Eating good fats

Your brain needs fatty oils (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.

Good fats are in: nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), olives, avocados, oily fish, poultry, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.

Getting enough protein

Protein contains amino acids, which make up the chemicals your brain needs to regulate your thoughts and feelings. Along with fibre, it also helps control your blood sugar levels.

Protein is in: lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes (peas, beans and lentils), soya products, dark leafy greens, nuts and seeds.

If you eat meat, fish and other animal products, choose the best quality meat you can afford. Higher welfare meat is much better for you and the planet.



It might take your gut time to get used to a new eating pattern, so make changes slowly to give yourself time to adjust.



How's your gut feeling?

Your state of mind is closely connected to your gut, not just because of your physical comfort, but also because your gut uses many of the same chemicals as your brain, and communicates with it.

Healthy gut foods include: fibre (in fruits, vegetables and wholegrains), porridge, muesli, live yoghurt and fermented foods which contain probiotics.

Are you having too much caffeine?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having too much can make you feel anxious, disturb your sleep (especially if you have it in the evening), or give you withdrawal symptoms if you stop suddenly. Caffeine is in: tea, coffee, cola and other manufactured energy drinks, and chocolate. Reduce your caffeine slowly to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Are you taking medication?

Psychiatric medication: some foods can be dangerous to eat if you're taking certain psychiatric medication. Find out more on the Mind website: www.mind.org.uk

Vegetables and water

Eating at least "five a day" and drinking plenty of water are also important for mental and physical wellbeing. More info: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eight-tips-healthy-eating.aspx#thirsty



Healthy Weight Management

Yo-yo and fad diets make subsequent weight loss harder. A diet is a way of eating that you need to be able to do for life. The County Council provides free access to effective weight loss programmes. Some of your participants may be eligible for free healthy weight management support. Anyone with a BMI of 30+ can get free help to lose weight. Anyone from an Asian background with a BMI of 23+, or anyone with other health complaints with a BMI of 27.5+, can also be referred. This includes free access to Weight Watchers, Slimming World, or Man vs. Fat Football. This is delivered by Achieve Oxfordshire. For more information visit the website for Healthy Weight Oxfordshire: www.achieveoxfordshire.org.uk

Make sure you have the information available, and you may choose to mention the service as part of your session. Make sure never to single an individual out – if they know you have the information and it is available for them to take, they may choose to ask you for further information. In this case, be supportive and informative. For more information on diets visit NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk



Organising cooking sessions

Planning your sessions

Ensure sessions have a clear aim

An aim might be about building confidence and certain skills. Or it may be about enabling people to cook for their family, address food poverty, be healthier, enjoy the therapeutic effects of cooking, transition to new accommodation, explore different foods, build social connections or make friends.

There might be an aim of empowerment, for example reversing the roles so that disabled participants are cooking for their carers. Having something to eat and having some food to take home may be main aims for some of your participants.

Whatever your core aims, try to make the sessions fun, accessible, interesting, supportive and useful. The messages need to be simple and easily understood by all participants. Make sure you feel comfortable with the messages and cooking tips you will cover. Make sure you match your wording and images to the message you want to get across.

Choose one main message

For each session, choose one main message that you will reinforce through each of your chosen recipes and activities. A simple, actionable message will allow your participants to walk away with a clear understanding of your purpose. Give participants one or more action items they can integrate into their daily lives to achieve that goal. It will also help you narrow down which recipes and activities to use.

Decide number of participants

Decide in advance the maximum number you can accommodate safely and comfortably in the cooking space, with enough space to work and equipment for everyone to use. You may also need to decide a minimum number, without which you will cancel the session.

This could be because you need to earn a certain amount before the session breaks even, or it could be because you feel participants will feel too exposed if the number of people taking part is too low.

Based on these numbers, consider the following:

- How many people are needed to show techniques, help with handing out ingredients, samples, recipes, or other info sheets?
- How many people are needed to help field questions about the recipes, healthy eating, your mission, or other topics? Who are the most appropriate people to answer each of these types of questions?
- If you are repeating the session, will you have enough people to take shifts?
- What other people could help connect participants to advice and guidance services or health programmes (e.g. a registered nurse, professional chef, or community engagement worker). Is it possible for them to come along to the session?

Think about any assistance you may need to help prepare your materials before the session (e.g. shopping for groceries, prepping ingredients). Consider asking your community partner if they can provide staff during the session to help with participants, troubleshoot any problems with the space, and answer any questions you may not know the answer to. These individuals will typically have a prior relationship with the participants and can be particularly helpful for managing any behaviour issues in the group (e.g. if working with children or teenagers).

You may also want to involve a local chef or food service provider. It's also a great idea to involve the kitchen staff at your partner organisation, if applicable.

Choose dishes and recipes for your session

As well as your main message, the dishes and recipes you cook should reinforce the Eatwell Guide and any health or nutrition education offered through your community partner or session location. Remember to

choose ingredients which have a wide appeal and recipes which are healthy and nutritionally balanced, paying attention to affordability and sustainability.

Determine in advance whether refrigeration is available at your site. If the venue does not have a fridge with enough space inside, you'll need to factor this in when selecting your ingredients.

Instead of using recipes, try taking the ingredients you have available as a starting point. The Good Food Cooking Toolkit was developed as a guide to cooking without recipes, and as a teaching aid for teaching transferable cooking skills. This approach is especially suitable if you will use ingredients from a food bank, community larder or seasonal veg from a veg box in your sessions, as it allows you to improvise on the spot and create dishes. For cooking session participants who need some guidance or inspiration, there are also a growing number of flexirecipes based on the Good Food Cooking Toolkit available to download from www.goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.



Think about timing

Plan the number of activities and recipes that can be completed in the amount of time you have. You may wish to have an extra activity or two planned, just in case things go differently to how you expect them to. Decide whether your session is “cook and share” i.e. everyone eats together, or “bake and take” i.e. participants cook together to take food away with them.

Limit the use of special equipment

Try to use items which are available in the average kitchen. Consider whether each item is necessary and whether it could be replaced with a less expensive tool. For example:

- Could you use a knife instead of a pizza cutter?
- Could you use a wooden spoon instead of an electric mixer?

Handheld blenders can be used when the recipe cannot be mixed properly without one, but offer alternative options for those of the group who don't have access to this item of equipment at home. For example: “You could make a vegetable soup which has vegetable chunks in it, rather than a smooth one like I'm making here”.

Make it snappy

There is little time for cooking in the average home. Ignite a positive attitude to cooking at home by creating recipes that can be made swiftly.

- Aim for total preparation time of no more than 45 minutes to an hour, including both prep and cooking time.
- Include these times in the recipes.
- Consider using no-cook recipes in your session. This is particularly helpful if your session is held at a location where you don't have access to refrigeration or cooking equipment (for example, a homeless shelter).

Keep it simple

Write the instructions in short, succinct, numbered steps. Ensure that the recipe is written at an appropriate level for the participants, especially if they have basic reading skills and/or English is not their first language.



Before you start

Initial assessment

It's important to identify what you think people want to get out of the sessions. This could be to do with knowledge, skills, behaviour, feeling of wellbeing or any other reasonable change you would like the sessions to make for people.

If you do an initial assessment, you can see if anything has changed for your evaluation at the end. Start where people are at and ask people what the situation is for them now.

Choose criteria which are relevant – they could be ones which you have agreed with your community partner and/or funder. You could also suggest to your participants what change they might want to measure for themselves.

You could do your initial assessment in lots of different ways. It could be a fun quiz for adults, a drawing activity for children, or a "barometer" activity where you say different statements and ask people to stand along an imaginary line depending on how much they agree (at one end) or disagree (at the other end).

Differentiation

Differentiation is about using a range of different approaches and resources to meet the needs of individuals and groups. Different participants may have different levels of experience and ability, and differentiation is about providing relevant experiences for them.

You could provide extension activities for people with more experience and confidence – e.g. they would prepare a side salad unsupervised while you help others prepare the main dish.

Or you could set more experienced participants to demonstrate and then supervise a new skill with other participants e.g. preparing crushed garlic. Paired activities can be fun and rewarding for everyone if done in a supportive atmosphere.

Learning Styles

Different people learn best in different ways and it is a good idea to plan activities which appeal to different learning styles and preferences. Most people don't neatly fit into a single learning style, but they may well have a preference for one or two of them. So rather than thinking of learning styles as clear-cut categories, try to incorporate a diverse range of learning activities and materials into your teaching to fit different people's preferences and to be appropriate to the subject matter. Be aware of access needs in relation to these styles.

Honey and Mumford (1986) identified four learning styles:

activist

theorist

pragmatist

reflector

Fleming and Mills (1992) identified a different four types of learning:

visual

aural

read/write

kinaesthetic

Evaluation

It's important to plan in advance how you want to evaluate your sessions – don't leave it to the end. Include recording a benchmark or starting point. Always think about recording what is happening before and after. This will help to make sure your sessions are well planned and designed with the results in mind. If you are linking

Resources tip



Find an example of an initial assessment form in the resources section or design your own. You can download an editable version of the example at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

What is learning?



According to a definition attributed to Allen Tough (1974), learning is "a change in knowledge and/or skills and/or attitude". Read up more on teaching and learning on Ann Gravells' website: www.anngravells.com/information/teaching-and-learning



with a community partner, discuss ideas with them. Ensure that everyone understands how important it is to collect baselines and feedback for evaluation and improvement of future sessions. Make sure you have agreed upon how the baselines and feedback will be collected, recorded and presented.

You may choose to use:

- Evaluation forms
- A simple 'scores on the doors' system – where participants stick a post-it note to the door on the way out with the score 1 to 5 on it, and a reason why they gave that score. Or you can ask them to vote by putting buttons in jars with smileys on them.
- Ask participants to rate the session by standing along a continuum in the room, or putting their thumbs up or down; then ask each of them one thing they appreciated/ learned and one thing they would have liked or would improve.
- Before and after self-assessment questionnaires on people's attitudes and behaviours. Consider using non-written forms of self-assessment.
- An Outcomes Star format (see www.outcomesstar.org.uk)
- For children – you could ask them at the end of the session to draw what they learnt, or ask parents or carers to help them fill in their responses.
- Smiley faces on feedback forms can help people new to English and are especially useful for children.
- It may be good to ask people to talk through their responses as a warm-up before they complete the form.

Evaluations can help you refine future sessions and allow you to report basic outcomes to any organisations that have provided support, resources or funding. Evaluating sessions may also support applications for future funding if they demonstrate positive changes or success.

Evaluations should be short (no more than five to six questions) and ask concise, direct, open questions that are not leading. Let participants know you will be using this information to improve the next sessions and (if applicable) to include in your publicity materials.

Remember to print out and bring your forms, plus extra pens, pencils, and clipboards for the participants to complete the form.

Once the session is over, you may also ask community partner staff, fellow session leaders, and helpers to provide verbal or written feedback. Give everyone a chance to express their views.

Questions could include:

- Was the message appropriate for the participants? If not, why?
- Did the participants seem engaged during the session? If not, why?
- What types of questions did the participants ask?
- Did the participants demonstrate their understanding of the concepts taught? How do you know?
- Did the participants enjoy the recipes?
- Which ones were favourites?
- Which ones were less successful?

Consider the following steps as you make final preparations to lead your sessions:

Complete a session plan

A session plan allows you to map out your detailed plan for the session. Make sure to plan the start and finish time of each section of the session, specific talking points you want to be sure to mention, activities that you need to do and activities that participants will do, plus equipment needed. Be sure to bring this plan with you on the day – it can help to have it in a clear plastic wallet to keep it safe from food splashes.

Resources tip



There are examples of a feedback form and an end of course assessment form in the resources section, or design your own. You can download an editable version at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

Resources tip



Several session plan templates are included in the resources section.

Download editable versions at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.



Session planning versus go with the flow

Cooking facilitators tend to agree that it's important to get a good balance between ensuring the sessions cover the skills and messages you have already agreed (which may be more or less prescribed by the community partner or funder) and ensuring your participants get what they want out of the session. If you have several sessions, it can be a good idea to have the first session well planned out, but include a section on what people want to learn and what they want to get out of the sessions. You can then focus the next sessions on what participants have asked for.

If the structure is fairly set, you may prefer to leave the final session open, so that in the session before, you can ask people what they would really like to cover that hasn't been done yet – and perhaps have a vote. Then the winning dish can take centre stage next session.

Learner-led

Try to get what participants want into the sessions, to avoid too much "top down messaging". It takes practice, but aim for a learner-led approach which triggers curiosity and brings out skills and debate. Your evaluation procedure should also help participants assess the sessions against what they wanted.

You may want to use recipes you trust. Or you may want to be adventurous and cook recipes that you've never cooked before – that way you can all work it out together. If you have the confidence, that means you can make the most out of mistakes – ask the question "How would you improve this?" On the advice of one facilitator, don't aim for perfection! Don't be self-critical, allow mistakes and move on. And don't take offence if people don't like a recipe!

If you can, ask the question "What do you want to cook next week?"

Consider a practice run

If feasible, it's a good idea to rehearse your session in advance. Practice cooking the recipes and rehearsing the activities with everyone who will be helping to run it. This will help you understand any timing issues or other kinks you want to work out before the big day. Sufficient preparation will help ensure a smooth flow to your session. If a practice run is not possible, try to run through the plan with your community partner and team.

Gather everything you need

Be sure you have reviewed your lists thoroughly and know who will be responsible for bringing each item to the session. Discuss any additional materials you may want (e.g. small plates for passing out samples or bowls to hold cut ingredients). Organise your ingredients and equipment by recipe and activity. This way, you will have the right materials handy at the right time.

Getting your sessions happening

Community partnerships

Partnering with a community-based organisation that serves the participants you wish to reach will improve the effectiveness of your sessions. A good community partner will have extensive experience working with these participants.

It's important to understand the goals of your community partner, what's been tried before, and what opportunities there may be to promote existing programmes or organisational successes. Look for ways that your session can fit into the goals and mission of the organisation. In working together like this, you can foster a great working relationship. Your partner may be able to help you organise the sessions, spread the word to prospective participants, and provide support during your sessions.

They might also be able to recommend a guest leader which can add a bit of variety for participants.

Potential partners in your community may include, but are not limited to, organisations such as:

Resources tip



Find planning and tools checklists in the resources section.

Download editable versions at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.



- schools (including after-school clubs)
- older people's services
- charities and community groups with existing programmes (e.g. community centre, youth club, lunch club, summer camp)
- food banks, community fridges or community cupboards
- farmers' markets or supermarkets (particularly those located in low income areas)
- housing associations
- homelessness charities
- religious groups

Get a champion

It may help to identify a champion or key contact within the organisation who is committed to helping you organise your session, learn the ins and outs of the session, and build enthusiasm. This champion may be a programme coordinator, events organiser, school teacher or administrator, or other staff member.

Communicate regularly with your partner to create a shared vision of the session and your involvement with the participants.

Discuss whether the session will be held on its own or could be incorporated into a pre-planned, larger event (e.g. a school health fair or multi-agency event) that may encourage higher attendance.

Begin the relationship by asking questions like:

- What are some of the food and health concerns of the participants you serve?
- What are your goals for improving health and wellbeing for these participants?
- What type of food related services or programmes already exist in the community? This may include:
 - nutrition or wellbeing class
 - food growing programme
 - food bank provision
 - lunch club
 - school breakfast club
 - after-school snacks or meals
 - summer holiday meals
 - promoting Healthy Start Vouchers

In each case, think about how your session can link with existing initiatives.

- Do you have a wellbeing policy or wellbeing standards for your organisation?
- What does it include?
- How can this session work alongside?
- Have any cooking sessions or tasting sessions been done at previous events?
- Were they successful?
- Why or why not?

Ask your community partner

Hold conversations with your community partner about what types of foods are popular with these participants, what foods these participants may want to learn how to cook, or what foods your partner may be trying to promote. Be sure you ask about the basic characteristics of your target group so you can choose culturally, economically, and age-appropriate foods.

Securing resources and funding

Consider seeking support for implementing your sessions. For instance:

- funding applications to Trusts and Foundations, especially if they are aimed at people on a low income or have a specific health focus
- sponsorship for running sessions or even just for ingredients



- talk to your community partner about what resources they already have on hand (such as equipment, paper plates, or utensils) or what they are willing to offer (like funding for food costs)
- ask staff at a local food bank, farmers' market, or supermarket if they would be willing to donate or provide food at a discount for the activities – with a letter to a supermarket store manager, you can often be given a donation of £20 to £30-worth of ingredients for sessions.
- other possibilities for food donations include churches, mosques and other community organisations.
- look for small grant opportunities available through service or grantmaking organisations in your community, local councillors, or talk to your community partner about including these costs in larger grant applications.

If you are going to be seeking support for future sessions, it's really important that you have evidence of the impact of your previous sessions from previous participants. Proper evaluation is the key to this – see the Evaluation forms in the Resources pack.

Getting participants to come along

Choose a venue

Talk to your community partner about spaces at their site or nearby that can be used for the session. Or, if your session is part of a larger event, speak with event organisers about where your demo will be located. Keep the following considerations in mind:

- Has the space been checked by your district's Environmental Health Officers (Scores on the Doors)?
- Is the space accessible for all participants? How could you accommodate a wheelchair-user, someone who walks with a stick, or someone who comes along with a carer?
- Is there childcare available? This can be absolutely fundamental if you are trying to reach parents of young children. Or are there elements participants can do with children?
- Find out about public transport routes and times, and parking.
- Make sure to ask your participants if they have any access needs, and be prepared to accommodate them in your venue and/or your sessions. For example, some people with dyslexia require handouts to be printed on blue or yellow paper; some participants may ask to audio record a session so they can play it back later; and so on.
- Some people may just want to come along with their care worker and watch – it's important for you to incorporate this if possible and you may need to explain to the group that any amount of participation is welcome.
- Spaces should have sinks available for hand and food washing. If this is not possible, wash hands and food in advance and remember to bring hand sanitiser. This is especially true of outdoor sessions (e.g. at a food fair).
- Additional kitchen equipment can sometimes be helpful, including multiple items such as wooden spoons and mixing bowls. If using, check if the venue has regulations about what equipment can be brought on-site, and whether there are sufficient electrical outlets and extension cords for burners, blenders, or other equipment.
- Spaces should have adequate room for working with the number of participants expected.

Prior to your session, do a thorough walk-through of the space to learn the location of:

- the toilets
- emergency exits
- bins
- food waste
- recycling

This will help avoid surprises and can set you and your helpers at ease about the session. Keep notes on any important points you should mention as part of the housekeeping section at the start of the first session. It may also help keep costs down, as you might discover supplies you do not need to bring.

Choosing a date and time

If your sessions will not be held as part of a larger, pre-planned event, check with your community partner well in advance about the best date and time for holding your sessions. Ask your partner about high-traffic

times at the space you are using (i.e. times where you may be able to attract more participants). Also ask about any holidays, inset days, religious festivals, or other events that would impact normal scheduling.

Think about school times – sessions held during the school day with enough time to pick up children are more likely to be popular with single parents. Avoid dates or times that may result in lower than normal attendance.

Promoting your sessions

If you are promoting the sessions from scratch, make sure you have considered:

- word of mouth and paper signup with your community partner
- posters – in community centres, local shops, doctors' surgeries, schools, nurseries and other community settings
- flyers – especially good for handing out at school gates or community centre activities, or there may even be an option for a local delivery service to deliver door-to-door
- social media – this can be surprisingly effective. Consider Twitter, Facebook and Nextdoor in particular. Facebook is particularly good for parents – this cohort regularly uses Facebook.

You may want to consider paying to promote your posts to a specific geographic area. This can be as focused as a postcode area, or to a specific interest group. Ask your community partners to reshare your posts.

- Community newspapers – many communities have these and you may also be able to promote sessions in the parish newsletter or other local publications.
- Press-release for local newspapers and radio – think about the kind of story you want to tell and the messages you want to communicate.

If you use images on any printed material or online, make sure they represent a diverse range of people to be widely appealing. You want your target audience to think “there will be people like me at the sessions”.

If you are running your sessions at a pre-existing community event, ensure you get the information out to the people responsible for promotion. Then they can include it in any newsletters, community newspapers, social media and press releases.

Remember to include: day, date, time, location, title of sessions, whether they are a series or a one-off, any cost, a very brief description of what you will cover, any benefits for attendees, any booking deadline, your contact details and/or how to book. If you need to, set a date that participants need to sign up by, so you know the number of people attending.

Some facilitators charge a nominal fee (say £1) to cover ingredients and to encourage people to actually attend when they book, as it encourages buy-in. Others have a fee which is taken up-front and refunded if a participant completes the course. Another way of encouraging attendance is to advertise that if participants come to four out of six sessions, they get a piece of cooking equipment of their choice (up to £30). If your session is funded, this would have to be agreed with the funder.

Reminders

It's a good idea to send out a reminder to participants a few days before your session. This should be in the same format as the one they used to contact you so e.g. email, text message, letter or phone conversation. Include the day, date, time, location, length of session, practical information about travel and parking, anything they need to bring, and anything else they need to know.

Be friendly and welcoming in your reminder and invite questions. Ask them to tell you of any relevant health information, allergies or access needs.

Ask them to let you know if they have been ill (diarrhoea and/or vomiting) in the last 48 hours – as attending would not be good for food safety.

Some facilitators ask people to text if they are not going to turn up – as it's not worth running a session with fewer than three participants, in terms of the momentum and group dynamics of a session (this can also be an issue in terms of personal safety).

With cooking sessions it's good to understand that some people may have chaotic lives and consistency of attendance might be a problem over a course. Weather also affects turn out!

Safety

Though the risks may be small, take necessary precautions to ensure safety:

- Ask your community partner or event organiser of any emergency plans or evacuation routes to be aware of (e.g. in the event of a fire).
- Keep a first aid kit and accident book on hand if the venue does not provide one.
- Do a risk assessment of activities – this is particularly important if teaching children.
- Ask if you are covered for public liability through your community partner or event organiser. If not, you are likely to need public liability insurance. Otherwise, you may wish to ask participants to sign a short disclaimer before taking part. A sample disclaimer is provided, but we can't be responsible for its use. Please make sure you are happy with it before using it.
- Illness: Check yourself, and with your participants, that they have not been ill (diarrhoea and/or vomiting) in the last 48 hours.
- Clearly label food allergens. Food allergies can be associated with any food, but most reactions are triggered by just eight foods: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soya, wheat, peanuts, and tree nuts. Choose foods and recipes that avoid these allergens when possible. If using, be sure to label any foods that contain these ingredients.

On the day: Running your sessions

Personal safety

Make sure you are aware of your own personal safety and that of the group, and add it to your risk assessment.

From a personal safety point of view, it is a good idea to have a policy that you never work with just one or two participants – having three or more participants will make sure you are never working alone. Make sure you know who else is in the building if you need support, and where your exit routes are. This is very unlikely to be an issue but it's important to just think for a moment to make sure you are safe.

Another piece of advice from fellow cooking facilitators is to make sure you know where the knives and other sharp objects are, count them out, and count them back in again. This is another precaution that seems extreme but it's good to just take note.

Icebreakers

Icebreakers are an important way to help everyone to relax (including you!), get to know each other, and therefore be ready for the session. You might like to try a food-related icebreaker e.g. everyone goes round and says their name and their favourite food / what they had for dinner last night / famous person they would like to go for dinner with, and what they would eat. Be aware of your group and make sure the icebreaker draws out common ground rather than inequalities between people e.g. you wouldn't want to ask "where did you last go on holiday" as it may make some participants feel inadequate. Avoid direct questions and anything that may be exposing.

Eating can be a great icebreaker in itself, as eating together means you have a shared experience. Is it appropriate to start with a meal and then go on to a skills session?

Set ground rules

Ensure your sessions are supportive and positive to ensure the best chance of getting the message across. Ground rules are a list of rules for the group that everyone helps to design and agrees to stick to. Agreeing ground rules at the beginning can help people relax and settle in, and helps with managing people's views. Examples might be "switch phones on silent", "support everyone to have a chance to speak", "if people don't like the taste of new dishes they are trying, they should keep that opinion quiet to enable everyone to have a chance to enjoy the experience".

Resources tip



It's a good idea to keep a record of who has attended and to get permission to take photos. Find an example of an attendance list and disclaimer form in the resources section. You can download an editable version at goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.



If you have some particular ground rules you like to have in place, keep them to the end and if they haven't already been covered then add them yourself, with the group's permission.

Offer opportunities for participants to shape the sessions

Ask participants what they would like to learn and try to incorporate their requests into the session or future sessions. Come back to it and try to offer alternatives if you can't provide exactly what people want.

Initial assessment

Now is the time to do your initial assessment (see the chapter on "Before you start"). Use the format you have designed and also try to incorporate measures of the things the participants themselves want to change. Make sure they are achievable so that they are encouraging rather than disheartening.

Provide an overview

Let participants know what they will be expected to do during this session. Hand out copies of the recipe and review it together. Explain what their roles will be (e.g. this half of the table will combine these wet ingredients while the other half combines the dry ingredients, or everyone will make their own version to take home).

Demonstrate the skills

Before handing out ingredients and allowing participants to begin, demonstrate the key skills. Use just enough of each ingredient to show participants the basic technique and any safety tips.

Have a go

Get participants to have a go at all the skills you have demonstrated, in order to make the dish you have decided on. Encourage those who are more nervous and provide extra activities for those who are confident. You may want to pair people up to help each other, but make sure everyone gets a chance to learn.

Tips if you are short on time

- Cut food into smaller pieces so it cooks faster.
- Do prep work for more than one recipe at the same time.
- Demonstrate only the more complex steps. For easier steps that participants are likely to be familiar with (e.g. peeling veggies, boiling pasta), just explain what you have done.
- Use the time when participants are prepping to introduce talking points or tips. This will help keep the session moving and use time efficiently.

Clear up

Make sure you are able to have everyone help with clearing and cleaning up – it's a vital part of cooking! Try to make sure tasks are shared equally and/or rotated if there are several sessions.

Wrap up

Try to make sure you leave enough time at the end of the session for people to go through in their minds and reflect on what they have learned. To help people to remember, you could provide an activity where people consolidate what they did – perhaps by talking through what they did, writing out a recipe or doing a fun quiz on what they learned.

Evaluation and feedback

If this is the only session you will need to do a quick evaluation to see if anything has changed for your participants – perhaps another quick quiz, or barometer exercise. For a series of sessions, you can use the evaluation ideas provided. Try to ask for simple feedback for a single session (e.g. "scores on the doors") or more detailed feedback if it is a series.



Ending the session

Thank your participants and see them off. Pack up your equipment and check with the venue that they are happy with the state of the kitchen. Try to get some brief feedback from your community partner before you leave. The next day, follow up with a request for more detailed feedback and start planning your next sessions!

Tell us what you think

We sincerely hope you will find this handbook useful. If you have used this handbook, the Good Food Cooking Toolkit or our other resources for your sessions, please share your feedback to help us to improve the resources available to cooking skills facilitators in Oxfordshire.

If there is anything that you have found particularly useful, that you think could be improved or that you think should be included, please get in touch with us at: mail@gfo.org.uk

Thank you so much for the work you do to teach people cooking skills for life and support them to make the most of the delicious variety of healthy, affordable and sustainable food available to them in Oxfordshire.

This handbook is an updated version of the Good Food Cooking Framework, originally compiled in 2018 by Good Food Oxford with the support of Relish, Brighter Futures in Banbury, Feeding The Gaps, The Oxford Food Surplus Café, Oxfordshire Mind, Replenish Oxfordshire, Community Action Groups Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire County Council. It has the support of the Public Health Team at Oxfordshire County Council.

Resources

All resources are available for download from www.goodfoodoxford.org/cooking-resources.

'Finding the balance' A4 poster

Good Food Cooking Sessions Scorecard

Eatwell Guide, and plant-based version by Made in Hackney

Initial planning checklist

Session plan

Session plan – example

Risk assessment template

Final planning checklist

Tools and equipment checklist

Attendance record

Disclaimer form

Initial assessment form

End of course assessment form

Participant feedback form

Useful links and service providers

