



Baking a DIFFERENCE

Making bread can be a delicious, healthy and educational experience for your children, says founder of Grub4Life, **Nigel Denby...**

Baking has seen a revival in the last couple of years – children of all ages are getting interested in having a go, which is fantastic. If you fancy bringing some 'Bake Off' inspiration to your setting then read on – we've got everything you need to get started...

While fairy cakes, flapjacks and meringues all have their place, don't forget how easy it is to bake bread. The comforting smell of a freshly baked loaf is something that stays with us for a lifetime, and making bread can be a very therapeutic activity for children: if they are angry, or frustrated they can really release their emotions on the dough. They can also let their creativity run away with them by designing different shaped buns and adding different seeds or dried fruits.

From a nutritional point of view bread is great for children; it's packed full of long-lasting energy, B vitamins and calcium (flour in the UK is fortified with calcium). Bread is also a useful vehicle to teach children about other foods: cream cheese, humus, lean cold meats and fish are all protein-packed toppings, which children need to eat to build muscle and gain nutrients like iron, omega-3s and calcium. Chocolate spread, jam, marmalade and lemon curd are tasty, but they are very high in sugar, so should only be used in small amounts.

If you're not a confident cook you could be tempted to take the automated option. Bread-making machines are time-savers, but although they produce delicious loaves, popping all the ingredients in a machine and leaving it to get on with it isn't quite as satisfying or interactive as making a crusty

loaf of bread the old-fashioned way. And in reality, there's nothing complicated about doing just that.

Things to remember

You need a warm room in which to make the dough. If you don't have that, you definitely need a warm place, such as a draught-free, sunny window-sill, where you can leave the dough to rise. Use the special bread-making flour you can buy. It's called 'strong' or 'very strong' flour and comes in different varieties, including white, wholemeal and soft grain.

If you're a bread making novice it's important to measure everything accurately and to follow the recipe carefully. This isn't the time for guess work or improvisation.



find out more

If you would like help in planning your nursery menu or devising a food and nutrition policy, contact nigel@grub4life.com or visit grub4life.org.uk

made without yeast, which saves time waiting for the dough to prove. If you are short of time, try making soda bread – you can have it from the bowl to the table in under an hour!

Soda bread

What you need:

500g plain flour
2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 tsp fine sea salt
Approx. 400ml buttermilk or live yoghurt
A little milk, if necessary

What you do:

- Sift the flour and bicarbonate of soda into a large mixing bowl and stir in the salt. Make a well in the centre and pour in the buttermilk, stirring as you go. If necessary, add a tablespoon or two of milk to bring the mixture together; it should form a soft dough, just this side of sticky.
- Tip it out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead lightly for about a minute, just long enough to pull it together into a loose ball but no longer – you need to get it into the oven while the bicarb is still doing its stuff. You're not looking for the kind of smooth, elastic dough you'd get with a yeast-based bread.
- Put the round of dough on a lightly floured baking sheet and dust generously with flour. Mark a deep cross in it with a sharp, serrated knife, cutting about two-thirds of the way through the loaf. Put it in an oven preheated to 200C, Gas 6 and bake for 40–45 minutes, until the loaf sounds hollow when tapped underneath.
- Cool on a wire rack if you like a crunchy crust, or wrap in a clean tea towel if you prefer a soft crust.

GETTING CHILDREN INVOLVED

- Plan ahead to include the bread you make as a snack, so everyone can eat the product of their hard work.
- Let the children help gather and weigh the ingredients, so you can talk about them together.
- Remember good hygiene – clean hands and aprons, etc!
- Allow a little extra time for the preparation of the dough so that the children can help with kneading.
- Expect some mess!
- Show the children the risen dough before it goes in the oven.

Simple bread recipe

What you need:

425g/15oz strong white bread flour (or use any combination of strong white/wholemeal/granary bread flour)
2 tbsp melted butter, olive oil or vegetable oil
1 ½ tsp sugar or honey
½ tsp salt
1 ¼ tsp fast action dried yeast
260ml/9fl oz warm water or milk

What you do:

- Put all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix thoroughly to make a soft dough. Shake some flour over the working surface and turn the dough out onto it.
- Knead the dough for 10 minutes. Kneading is a folding and pushing process. Fold the dough over towards you and then push it away using the heel of your hand (the bit at the bottom of your palm). Turn the dough round a quarter-circle and repeat. Fold then push then turn. Keep on doing this until the dough is smooth and not at all sticky.
- Now place the dough in a greased 2lb loaf tin, cover it with a clean tea towel, and leave it in a warm place to rise (prove) until it has doubled in size.
- While it's rising, which can take an hour or more, preheat the oven to 220C, Gas 7. When the dough has risen, brush the top with milk for a golden crust. Turn the oven down to 200C/Gas 6, and bake in the centre of the oven for 25–30 minutes.
- The bottom of the loaf should sound hollow when tapped – but use oven gloves to take it from the oven and to tip it out of its tin. Allow to cool before cutting and enjoying a thick slice, spread with butter!

ALTERNATIVELY: cut the dough into about 12 pieces and make into bread rolls. Bake for 10–15 minutes.

Feeling a little more adventurous?

To make a cottage loaf, divide the dough into two, one larger than the other. Roll both into balls. Place the smaller ball on top of the larger and press together. To make a plaited loaf, divide the dough into three equal pieces. Roll out into sausage shapes and plait together.

Variations:

You can make different breads by adding different combinations of ingredients to the dough mixture, before you leave it to rise:

- Add a couple of tbsp of sunflower, pumpkin, sesame or poppy seeds.
- Add 3–4 tbsp of dried fruits (raisins, chopped dried apricots, cranberries, etc.) and ½ tsp of cinnamon.
- Add 1 tsp of mixed dried herbs, some black pepper and 1 tbsp of chopped sun dried tomatoes and/or olives.

All bread needs flour, but if you have to care for any children with wheat allergies, there are some excellent wheat-free flours that work very well for bread making. You can also buy complete wheat-free bread mixes at www.dovesfarm.co.uk

Salt is an ingredient that most nurseries avoid adding to any food served to children. When it comes to bread, salt is essential – it stops the yeast from 'over working', which would cause the bread to be full of holes. The amount of salt used in these recipes is very low: a serving provides less than 0.5g of salt, which is well under maximum recommended salt intakes for children.

A lot of keen bread makers prefer to use live yeast in their baking. You often need to use less live yeast than a recipe may advise for bread made with dried yeast, so be prepared to experiment a little. Live yeast can be purchased from some deli counters and health food shops. Some bread can be



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