

Guiding practices for running community cooking programs

York Region Public Health, Nutrition Services encourages organizations to use the following guiding practices when offering cooking programs in the community:

1. Offer at least four weekly cooking sessions to the same clients.
2. Focus the program on the enjoyment of eating and cooking with basic fresh ingredients.
3. Ensure practical learning is offered via hands-on cooking activities.
4. Use the following criteria for including recipes to prepare in the program:
 - Health profile - All recipes include a vegetable or fruit, are low in fat and salt, and high in fibre
 - Available ingredients – Recipe ingredients can be found at any major grocery store and no more than 12 key ingredients in recipe
 - Time – Recipe can be completed within 30-45 minutes
 - Skill – Recipe techniques are basic and easy to follow and adaptable
 - Equipment – Recipes require basic kitchen equipment
 - Cost – Recipe ingredients are reasonably priced
5. Ensure adequate numbers of staff are available to support the cooking program. We recommend one trained leader for every four participants. Opportunities to include peer-modelling is very beneficial.
6. Ensure appropriate cooking equipment and infrastructure (e.g., two sinks, fridge).
7. Follow safe food handling practices.
8. If children or adolescents are learning to cook, involve parents when possible (e.g., invite parents into the last session to enjoy the meal together).
9. Provide recognition of success in completing the program (e.g., certificate)

Brooks N, Begley A. Adolescent food literacy programmes: A review of the literature. Dietitians Association of Australia 2013.

Fordyce-Voorham S. Identification of essential food skills for skill-based healthful eating programs in secondary schools. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour 2011;43:116-122.

