

Are all great cooks created equal?

Background

Good cooks are the food gatekeepers of their family. What they make, their family eat. They help form the eating habits of the family. You do not have to be a chef to be a great cook. Great domestic cooks take many forms. Within the United States, most great cooks can be categorized in one of five categories:

- **Giving Cooks** (22%) - Friendly, well-liked, enthusiastic cooks who specialize on comfort foods for family gatherings and large parties. Seldom experiment with new dishes, instead rely on traditional favorites
- **Healthy Cooks** (20%) - Optimistic, book-loving, nature enthusiasts who are most likely to experiment with fish and with fresh ingredients, including herbs.
- **Innovative Cooks** (19%) - The most creative, trend-setting of all cooks. Seldom using recipes, they experiment with ingredients, cuisine styles, and cooking methods.
- **Methodical Cooks** (18%) - Often weekend hobbyists who are talented, but who rely heavily on recipes. Somewhat inefficient in the kitchen, their creations always look exactly like the picture in the cookbook. Highest success rate of all cooks.
- **Competitive Cooks** (13%) - The Iron Chef of the neighborhood. Dominant personalities who cook in order to impress others. Intense in both their cooking and entertaining.

These categories have important implications for adopting and designing nutrition education. There are nutrition related characteristics associated with great cooks. Giving, Competitive and Methodical cooks are very socially influential. While Innovative and Competitive cooks are predisposed toward using new foods. In addition, Healthy and Methodical cooks are eager to learn. This shows that looking at all cooks as one segment is incorrect.

Key Teaching Point

- All cooks are not created equal. Great cooks take many forms.
- Great cooks influence family preference and facilitate healthy eating.

Student Demonstration

1. Before the session, make an overhead listing the five personality categories of a great cook and a short description of each (You can use the descriptions to the left). In this session have the students take out a piece of paper and a pencil and say . . .

Because good cooks are the "nutritional gatekeepers," they can influence nutrition decision. Nutrition education can target these cooks to promote healthy eating. Which type of cook is most likely to:

- *Replace applesauce for vegetable oil in cake recipe*
- *Use a recipe from a new soy cookbook*
- *Experiment with fresh blueberries in a fruit tart*
- *Prepare soy cookies for a family reunion*

2. Now ask the students to come up with ideas on how they can encourage each of the five categories to utilize tofu in a meal. Allow students to work in groups and brainstorm to encourage idea sharing and promote interest.

3. Another way to approach this is to ask students to identify a good cook from their personal experience. Have the students discuss which category best describes this cook and how they could encourage this cook to use tofu. This will allow the students to personalize the information.

Wansink, Brian (2003), "Profiling Nutritional Gatekeepers: Three Methods for Differentiating Influential Cooks," Food Quality and Preference, 14:4 (June), 289-297.

