

Make Your Own Pizza

A fun and easy sensory experience

What's not to like about pizza? You can top it with anything. Kids love it. And it's an easy recipe to make at home with your child who is visually impaired. Making pizza together also provides tons of sensory opportunities and helps build small motor skills.

With each step, we provide sensory suggestions for you to try with your child. You can follow one or all of the suggestions – touch, taste, see, smell, and hear.

This recipe makes four individual pizzas. Buon appetito!



Utensils

- Cutting board
- Kid-size safety knives, if using (available on Amazon)
- Serving bowls for toppings
- Rolling pin
- Two large, rimmed baking sheets
- Parchment paper
- Pizza cutter
- Serving platter or board

Ingredients

- One 14- to 16-oz. ball of pre-made pizza dough from your grocery store or local pizzeria
- 1 ½ cups marinara sauce
- 6 oz. of your favorite pizza cheese, such as mozzarella, Monterey Jack, Colby, or cheddar cheese, grated
- Toppings of your choice (Use your imagination! Here are some ideas: Sliced red or green peppers, chopped onions, sliced mushrooms, sliced olives, fresh basil leaves, roasted red peppers, blanched broccoli, or spinach leaves, chopped pineapple, cooked bacon, cooked chicken, cooked and crumbled Italian sausage, sliced pepperoni)
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Recipe	Suggested Sensory Directions
1. Gather the ingredients and utensils.	<p> What do the utensils feel like? Are their textures rough or smooth? This is a good time to explain why knives are sharp and should be handled carefully.</p> <p> What happens when you bang the rolling pin against the baking sheets? A kitchen band!</p> <p> As you pull out the rolling pin and the baking sheets, you could announce, “Pizza time!” as your clue that the activity is beginning.</p>

Recipe	Suggested Sensory Directions
<p>2. Let the pizza dough come to room temperature so it's easy for little hands to handle. As it warms up, the gluten in the dough relaxes and becomes more elastic.</p>	<p> What does the dough smell like?</p> <p> What does the dough feel like? Does it stick to your fingers? What happens to the dough as you break off a piece? It stretches.</p> <p> How can you create visual contrast? When you put the white dough on a colored cutting board, the dough is easier to see.</p>
<p>3. While the dough comes to room temperature, preheat the oven to 500° F.</p>	<p> Listen for the “beep” when the oven is ready.</p>
<p>4. Line the baking sheets with parchment paper or grease them with a little olive oil. You can use a basting brush to spread the oil on the baking sheet.</p>	<p> Hold a piece of parchment paper up to your face. What do you see? Only a little light passes through the paper. This is what some children with visual impairments see every day.</p> <p> If you're using olive oil instead of parchment paper, talk about how you're putting it on the pan. Use action words like “pour,” “spread,” or “paint” to label what you and your child are doing.</p>

Recipe	Suggested Sensory Directions
<p>5. Prepare your toppings while the oven preheats and put them into individual serving bowls. The more colorful the toppings, the better.</p>	<p> What does the sauce smell like? Tomatoes? What smells spicy? Pepperoni? Talk about the different scents that create pizza and other Italian food.</p> <p> The color of many simple pizza toppings are easy to see on the white background of cheese, which is why this is such a great activity for children who are visually impaired. Talk about their colors. The red or green pepper strips, sliced black olives, rounds of pepperoni, fresh green basil leaves. What other foods are the same colors? Talk about how someone might have grown this food in a garden or on a farm.</p> <p> Taste the toppings if your child is adventurous. Talk about how peppers are crunchy, olives are salty. Maybe your child prefers the milder flavor of mozzarella cheese.</p>
<p>6. Cut the ball of dough into four equal sizes. Give one piece of dough to your child to roll, stretch or press out to a 6- to 8-inch circle. Try not to overwork the dough or it will get tough. You might need to sprinkle a little flour on your work surface so the dough doesn't stick to it.</p>	<p> Let your child place their hands over yours as you roll the piece of dough with the rolling pin on a cutting board or other smooth surface. Smoosh the dough. Poke it. Smash it and listen to the sound it makes.</p> <p> Have fun making handprints or footprints. Feet are less tactilely sensitive than hands and new sensory experiences can be easily introduced through the feet.</p>

Recipe

Suggested Sensory Directions

7. Place two rounds of dough on each baking sheet. Top each round with two or three spoonfuls of sauce and spread the sauce to the edge of each pizza.



Dipping a spoon into your serving bowl of sauce, pouring the sauce on the pizza, and spreading it with the back of your spoon help children practice fine motor skills. Using hand under hand, let your child help you put the sauce on the pizza.



Notice how the red sauce “pops” on the white pizza dough.



As you spread the sauce, talk about the smooth texture. Maybe your sauce is chunky because there are pieces of tomato in it.

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8. Sprinkle some cheese on your pizza so the sauce is mostly covered. Use more if you like your pizza very cheesy.



Picking up grated cheese with your fingers might feel too sticky for little fingers, so with hand under hand, you and your child might try dipping a spoon into the serving bowl and sprinkling on the cheese with side-to-side wrist motions.

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9. Now it's time to top your pizza! Making pizza faces with your toppings, or another simple pattern, will prevent pizza makers from overloading their crusts. The simpler features will also be easier for your child to see if they have some use of their vision.



Picking up a slice of red pepper or a round of pepperoni with your fingers helps children practice fine motor skills such as grasp and release. What kind of face will you make with your child? Does your pizza wear glasses?



Lick your fingers after picking up a slice of pepperoni. Do they taste salty or spicy? Be sure to wash your hands afterwards.



Talk about the colors you're using on your pizza. If you're making a face, what color are the eyes? If you're using broccoli or spinach, why does your pizza have green hair or a beard? Maybe you're just making a pattern with the pepperoni. Count the slices out loud as you place them on the pizza.

Recipe	Suggested Sensory Directions
10. Put the baking sheets in the preheated oven. Bake the pizzas for 10 to 15 minutes, rotating them halfway through, until the crust is golden and the cheese begins to brown in spots.	 The hard part about making pizza is waiting for it to bake and cool down enough to eat. Read a book out loud with your child while you're waiting. Some of our favorites include <u>Grandpa and Me</u> by Karen Katz, <u>Cook It!</u> by George Birkett, <u>Pete the Cat and the Perfect Pizza Party</u> by Kimberly and James Dean and <u>Pizza Pat</u> by Rita Golden Gelman.  Listen for the timer on your oven when the pizza's done.
11. Remove the pizzas from the oven. Drizzle the pizzas with a little olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Let them cool for a few minutes before slicing.	 Talk about how the baking pans are hot when you take them out of the oven so you're putting them on a rack so they will cool down.  Practice blowing on your pizzas to cool them off.
12. Now you can eat your pizza!	 What happens to your pizza when you bake it? The crust gets crunchy! What happens when the cheese melts – does it feel the same or different? It looks different, too.  How do you eat your pizza? Do you cut the slices into perfect triangles? Do you eat the toppings first and save the crust for last? Your child might prefer their pizza cut into small bites. No matter how you slice it, pizza is perfect!
