The sauté method of cooking is a solution to preparing quick, easy and healthy meals on a busy schedule. The word Sauté is a French word that literally means “jump.” Chefs shake the sauté pan back and forth over the heat. Enough oil or butter is used to prevent sticking. Sautéing brings out the flavors in the food.

Chop the Ingredients Uniformly. Chop your ingredients into manageable, bite-size pieces. Cutting them up makes it easier to eat and to handle, and it also helps them cook faster and more evenly. Different foods will need to be cut differently in order to get the best taste. Carrots, for example, are very fibrous, so cut them in julienues strips (small uniform strips) before sautéing. Greens like spinach, on the other hand, will wilt very quickly and therefore won't need to be cut. Poultry and meats should be cut into uniform pieces. Ingredients of different sizes will cook unevenly, producing some food that is over- or undercooked. It sounds simple, but it's incredibly important. Place poultry or meat between two sheets of heavy-duty plastic wrap. Pound to a ½-inch thickness using a meat mallet or a rolling pin. You want a piece that is uniform in size and thickness. This is to ensure that it cooks quickly and evenly.

Don't crowd the pieces. Don’t crowd the pieces in the skillet or they will steam instead of browning. Cook the pieces in batches if necessary to prevent overcrowding.

Choose a Heavy Skillet. Choose a heavy skillet that is the right size for the amount of food you have. If the skillet is too large, pan juices can burn. If it's too small, they will steam instead of brown.

Add the Fat and Heat the Pan Before Adding the Food. Start heating on low heat. A slow steady heat is best. A couple of minutes before adding the food increase the heat to medium-high. You want your pan to get hot before adding your food. You want the oil sizzling but be careful that it does not smoke or burn. Starting the food in a hot skillet is important for several reasons:

- A colder pan has hot spots. And can cause uneven cooking, leaving you with some ingredients that are overcooked and others than are undercooked. As you continue to heat...
the pan, the heat distributes itself evenly over the entire pan, producing a better final product. Cold proteins on cold pans will dry out the proteins before they even begin to cook.

- Add your food, making sure your pan is big enough to hold all of it easily. Remember: you need space to move the food around in the pan.
- Stagger the introduction of the ingredients into the pan so that the first ingredients to hit the pan are the ones that take the longest to cook.

Test if the Food is Done. It should take around 5 – 7 minutes to sauté most firm vegetables. Most vegetables sautéed should be cooked al dente, which means just undercooked (as the ingredients will continue cooking even off the heat). Use a meat thermometer to check for the correct temperature for meat and poultry.

Don’t Press Down. If your pan is hot enough and it contains enough fat, you don’t need to press down on meats or veggies you’re sautéing in order to get them brown. This simply robs them of moisture.

Know the Difference. Know the difference between sautéing and other frying methods. As we’ve just learned, "sautéing" is a pretty specific term. It’s distinct from other cooking techniques:

- Pan-frying. Pan-frying doesn't involve tossing or stirring like sautéing would. Plus, pan-frying uses a little bit more fat at slightly lower temperatures than sautéing does.
- Stir-frying. Stir-frying is essentially the same as sautéing, except the heat is higher and the action is faster. Food is continuously turned, tossed and stirred; food is not necessarily allowed to brown.
- Sweating. Sweating is the process of cooking vegetables, such as onions, for a short while over low heat. The goal is to get the ingredients translucent and limp, not browned and crunchy.

STEAM AND SAUTÉ
Steam/sauté is a variation of the sautéing technique that included a steaming phase. Many vegetables do well using technique.

A small amount of liquid is used and the skillet is covered during this phase. The vegetables are steamed until crisp-tender (time will vary depending on the vegetable); the lid is removed; the vegetables are sautéed to intensify flavors.

No water is needed for tender greens (spinach, Swiss chard and beet greens) because the plant cells release water during the steaming process. Tender greens wilt quickly (3 – 5 minutes). When the greens are wilted the lid should be removed.

Evaporate the excess moisture and sauté.

Add fresh herbs during the sautéing phase. Add dried herbs and spices during the steaming phase.

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For more information on this or other family and consumer sciences related topics, contact Shelly Barnes, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent for UT Extension in Wilson County. Barnes can be reached at sbarnes@utk.edu or 615-444-9584.