

# Turkey Time Brain Building

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## **Cart Manager (4-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** While grocery shopping, ask your child if they can manage the cart by sorting your shopping into vegetables, fruits, frozen foods, or by color. Can they find a way to keep the boxes lined up so they don't topple over?

**Brainy Background:** When your child sorts food and manages space, they're using math concepts. Sorting is important for learning math.

## **Shopping Switcheroo (0 - 6 Months)**

**Vroom Tip:** Try to imagine what your child is seeing when they're with you at the store. Watch them and describe what you think they may be seeing. When they're looking at fruit, talk about what it is and how it tastes. Do the same in any store or aisle.

**Brainy Background:** When your child sees you watching and hears you talking about their experiences, they're making new connections in their brain between what they see and the words you use. As you go back and forth, you're teaching them they're valued.

## **Ins and Outs (18 Months - 2 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** At the market, point out the ins and outs with your child. Are they IN the cart? Is a worker taking fruit OUT of the box? Did you put food IN a bag? Are you walking OUT the door? Play often enough and they will get it and find ins and outs of their own!

**Brainy Background:** You're helping your child begin to think and talk about where objects are in relationship to one other. This helps them organize their understanding of the world. It takes time to develop but it is important for doing math in the future.

## **Unpack Your Bags (3-4 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** After shopping, invite your child to help take items out of the bags. Give them some small, safe items to put away, giving hints for where things go, like, "Are there other cans in the cupboard that look like this one?" or "An apple is a fruit. Where do we keep the other fruit?"

**Brainy Background:** Grouping things and being able to see similarities and differences helps your child make connections, which is at the heart of learning. You're also building their memory in fun ways while encouraging them to help out!

## **Shelf Help (4-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** When you get home from the store, ask your child to help you in the kitchen. Let them organize a shelf and find their own way to group things. If they need help, it's OK to suggest things like "boxes here and cans there." Or they could put crunchy food like cereal and crackers together. You can even give them a towel to wipe out the shelves to help you get started. Most children love to do grown-up things like this!

**Brainy Background:** Your child is building their brain when they organize and put things in groups. These skills will help them with math, reading, and science later in life. When they take on grown-up jobs, it can help them see things from different points of view.

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## **Cleanup Helper (2-4 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Invite your child to be the cleanup helper by giving them special jobs they can do. You can say, "Please help me find what needs to be washed in a washing machine." Or "Can you help wipe down the table or sweep up the crumbs on the floor?"

**Brainy Background:** When you help your child find ways they can help around the house, they learn they're an important part of your family's everyday routines. It also shows you believe in them, which encourages them to do more things on their own.

## **Cooking Lessons (2 – 5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** No matter what you're cooking, your child can be a helper. Give them a play-by-play of what you're using. If it's safe, let them touch, smell, or taste things too. Chat about what you're making: "Red pepper makes the beans spicy."

**Brainy Background:** Talking about everyday activities as you do them helps build your child's communication skills—and their brain! Be sure to point to objects as you say their name to help them learn new words.

## **Before and After (2.5 – 3 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Chat with your child about how foods change as you cook them. You could show them how a pancake or tortilla goes from doughy to solid. Or how pasta or rice becomes soft. Let them use all their senses and touch them before and after (once cooled.) Talk together about what you see!

**Brainy Background:** Exploring how food changes means thinking about the food in two ways: before and after. Holding two things in your mind like this and comparing them is a great brain-building skill. Scientists call this working memory.

## **Kitchen Helper (3-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Your child makes a great helper! When you're cooking, have your child help with simple tasks like adding an ingredient. Ask he or she what they think will happen when you add the ingredient (like pouring a cup of milk into flour) and then talk together about what actually happens.

**Brainy Background:** This is a real-life science experiment. Guessing about what might happen promotes your child's curiosity, which is critical to learning.

## **Little Chef (2-4 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Keep your child engaged in dinner prep. Take turns measuring, pouring, and mixing. If they might spill, put the bowl in the sink so spilling is okay. Talk to them about what you're doing and the ingredients you're using. Encourage them to smell, touch (and taste!) as you go. Ask them what they notice.

**Brainy Background:** This activity gives your child the opportunity to hear new words, which builds their vocabulary. Measuring involves counting, which will help them with math in the future. Having a conversation about the experience helps them develop their communication skills.

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## **Toddler Chef (3-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Get your child thinking as they help you prepare a snack or meal. Ask them, "Do you think all these noodles will fit in this bowl?" or "Should we use this big red tomato or the little one?" or "Would you like to peel these two bananas for the fruit salad?"

**Brainy Background:** As you cook together, you're teaching your child basics about the world around them—colors, sizes, numbers—and you're also helping them see that learning is fun.

## **Mini Chef (3-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Have your child help with safe and simple tasks while you are cooking. Mixing or adding an ingredient can be good places to start. As you work, ask them what they think will happen when they stir things together or add something new. Listen to their ideas, then talk together about what you see happening.

**Brainy Background:** This is real-life science. Guessing about what might happen promotes your child's curiosity. This helps them adopt a lifelong love of learning!

## **Spice Rack Smells (3 - 4 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** While working in the kitchen, open up different spices. Smell the differences and even touch them with your child. You can describe these smells (using dramatic words) and talk back and forth with them about some of the foods that you eat with them.

**Brainy Background:** Your child learns from their senses—from looking, listening, touching, and smelling. "Spice Rack Smells" uses all of these ways of learning. Making a meal together is a memorable way for them to have fun and to learn.

## **My Menu (3-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Get your little one in on the Thanksgiving prep by inviting them to help you "write" or draw each food on a paper titled "My Menu." Explain, "A menu tells people what they could eat." Later point out the name of each food as you serve it.

**Brainy Background:** Your child's Menu will help them see the connection among letters, sounds of a word, and actual foods. "Writing" (letters or scribbles that look like letters) and "reading" with you is a big step toward one day writing and reading on their own.

## **Menu Maker (4-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Involve your child in meal planning. Ask them to choose how to organize the meal. Can they do it by color or family favorites? For example, they could ask family members which dish is their favorite. Then help your child draw or write a menu based on everyone's picks.

**Brainy Background:** Your child is using important skills to make their menu. They're grouping things and making connections. They're learning how important language is in daily life and using early reading skills.

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## **Photo Tour Guide (3 – 5 Years)**

Vroom Tip: Share Family Photos with your child before your family gathers for Thanksgiving. Take turns talking about your memories and stories about the events and people in the pictures. Ask them to point out the details in the pictures that help them know what was happening.

Brainy Background: Your child is using their working memory and focus to look closely at the photos and remember the stories that go along with them. You're encouraging your child to "read" the pictures and to use their communication skills to figure out how to tell the story – a big part of learning to read and write.

## **Thankful Tidbits (3-5 Years)**

Vroom Tip: When it comes down to it, it's all about making the most of the moments you have together. Take time to focus on gratitude. Take turns with your child listing things you're thankful for. Here's an easy one to start with, "I'm thankful for you!" Then, help them think of something they're thankful to have in their life. See how many times you can go back and forth.

Brainy Background: Every back-and-forth conversation builds your child's brain. After they say something, repeat it back in complete sentences. And did you know that paying attention to what's positive in your life has been shown to lead to more happiness and satisfaction for both of you? Win win.



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## **Table Talk (18 Months – 2 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** As you sit down to eat, look at the table and talk with your child about where things are. "Where's the plate? The plate is on the table. Veggies are in the bowl. The spoon is next to the plate." What if you move them? "Now, where is the spoon?"

**Brainy Background:** You're helping your child learn how to think and talk about where objects are in relationship to each other. This takes time to develop but it helps them make sense of the world around them and is important for learning math in the future.

## **Animal Bites (18 Months – 3 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Sometimes mealtime can be a challenge. Encourage your child to eat by offering them choices about how they eat. You can say something like, "Do you want two big dinosaur bites or four little bird bites?" Count the bites together and ask them to think of their own "Animal Bites" eating ideas.

**Brainy Background:** When you help your child to make their own choices, you show them they can do even difficult things. This helps them take on challenges and develop confidence. Counting "Animal Bites" together is a fun math experience for them too!

## **Category Convos (2-3 years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Tell your child about a favorite food. Ask them to name a food they like that's in the same category, like fruit, but different. Keep count of how many different things you both like in the same category. Play the same game with something else, like clothes!

**Brainy Background:** This game is teaching your child about categories; things that are the same in important ways, though different in others. They're also learning about your likes and dislikes compared to theirs, helping them learn about other people.

## **Drawing Together (2-3 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** Sometimes when you're in the middle of a fun family moment, your child gets upset. Stay calm and do your best to comfort your child and encourage them to use words. If your child is too upset to talk, try to guess what your child is trying to say.

**Brainy Background:** Helping your child learn to express their feelings and solve problems is an essential tool for learning to manage strong emotions and communicate with others.



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## Snack Senses (2 – 4 Years)

**Vroom Tip:** Take turns with your child coming up with words that describe what they're eating. If they have a carrot ask, "What does it look like?" They might say, "orange," and you might say, "pointy." Keep the conversation going with questions like, "What does it feel, smell, and taste like?" or "What does it sound like when you eat it?"

**Brainy Background:** When you use lots of different words with your child, you help them build their vocabulary and connect words with what they mean. They're also practicing tuning out distractions to focus on one thing. These are important skills for learning to read.

## Mealtime Math (2 – 5 Years)

**Vroom Tip:** Are you eating crackers or other food like that? Ask your child how many they want. Give them that amount and say, "Eat one. How many are left?" Count together, encouraging them to count out loud. Then you take a turn. Continue this game until the crackers are all gone.

**Brainy Background:** In "Mealtime Math," your child is thinking in symbols—that the numeral 3 represents three of something. This game helps them begin to understand how to add and subtract in everyday life. Games like this help build a strong foundation for learning math later on.

## Math Munching (3 - 5 Years)

**Vroom Tip:** At mealtime or snacktime, create math stories with your child: "Imagine you're a hungry bear and these crackers look yummy." Count them together and invite them to choose a number of crackers to eat. Then ask: "How many crackers did you eat? How many crackers are left?"

**Brainy Background:** Having fun with math helps your child love learning, while becoming familiar with counting, numbers, and what they stand for. They're also learning to pay attention, hold numbers in their mind as they use this information, and use self-control not to eat everything all at once!

## Guess Who? (3 – 5 Years)

**Vroom Tip:** Ask your child to think of a family member or friend without telling you who. Have them give you hints until you guess who the mystery person is. Then it's your turn to pick a person and their turn to guess.

**Brainy Background:** This guessing game helps your child with critical thinking skills. They use these while figuring out the important things about a person to use as clues.

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After the Meal

## **Memory Book (3-5 Years)**

**Vroom Tip:** If you have just returned from visiting with family, invite your child to help you make a memory book using one or more photos from your visit. Write the words they use to describe what's happening in the pictures.

**Brainy Background:** When you write down our child's words after a family visit, they make connections between their real experiences, photos, and their words. They use working memory to remember details of the visit and communication skills to describe what happened.

## **Clean Up Coin Toss**

**Vroom Tip:** Help divide the post-Thanksgiving tasks in a fun way! Flip a coin to decide which job will be done first. For example, clearing the table will be "heads" and sweeping the floor will be "tails." Let your child flip the coin and call "heads or tails."

**Brainy Background:** When your child is matching the side of the coin to the job, they're using their memory, are focusing, and are thinking flexibly by taking several categories of information and matching them in different ways. This process is critical to learning. And bonus? You'll be done with the clean-up in no time!

## **Cleaning the Kitchen**

**Vroom Tip:** When your child helps put the dishes away, ask your child things like: "How do you know where the dishes go? Is there a place for the small bowls and a different place for the bigger ones?" Put something away in the wrong place and see what they do. Do they know where it really goes?

**Brainy Background:** In order to put the dishes and other kitchen items away, your child must listen carefully to your questions and use their memory to remember where each item goes. When you switch the rules and put something in a different place, you help them to think on their feet in changing conditions.

## **Back Together End of Day**

**Vroom Tip:** An especially good Brain Building activity for coming back together after a long day: at dinner or bedtime, ask them what their favorite part of the day was and be sure to ask plenty of follow-up questions! "Why did you like that? Was it more fun than the last time you did that? Why?" You can make this moment of reflection and gratitude a regular part of your day!

**Brainy Background:** This easy activity helps build language, communication, and reasoning skills. And it's also just a really powerful way to connect at the end of the day!