

Extension

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Newsletter

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Cooking More Meals at Home can Have Big Rewards Quick Meals in 30 Minutes or Less

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There are many benefits to sitting at a table and eating meals as a family. Children who eat meals with their families are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables, do better in school and are less likely to smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs, just to name a few.

Cooking meals at home has many benefits as well, such as saving money, controlling portion sizes and ingredient choices.



Tips for Success:

4 Secrets to Healthy 30 minute Meals:

1. **Keep your kitchen stocked with basic foods that can be turned into quick meals.** Store a variety of whole grain noodles or pasta and instant brown rice. Have some convenience foods such as, canned meats or fish in the pantry. A jar of spaghetti sauce or a can of tomato sauce and a packet of seasoning mix can turn a pound of ground meat into a meal in minutes. Pre-chopped fresh or frozen vegetables save time when putting together a quick meal. A bag of frozen shrimp or precooked meatballs can be a life saver when time is tight. A can of low-fat chili or cream of mushroom soup might be just the food item to bring a variety of ingredients together, making for a satisfying meal.
2. **Plan 3-7 days of menus at a time.** It will save you time shopping for and preparing food.
3. **If you have an idea what you are going to make the night before, take time to prepare as much of the food ahead of time as possible.** For example, put frozen foods in the refrigerator to thaw and chop, grate or pre-measure other ingredients.
4. **Post a list of at least 5 quick meals and the ingredients needed on the inside of a cupboard or pantry door.** Use this list to remind yourself of some quick meal ideas and/or ask the first person who gets home to pull out the ingredients on the list. Who knows, they might even be able to get started!

Quick and Easy Menu Ideas

- 1). Creamy Chicken and Rice
(canned or chopped deli chicken, instant brown rice & a can of reduced sodium cream of chicken soup)
Mixed Vegetables (frozen, cooked in microwave)
Orange Slices
Chocolate Pudding Cups
- 2). Spaghetti (whole grain spaghetti noodles & a jar of spaghetti sauce)
Cheese (part skim milk mozzarella)
Green Salad (bagged & ready to eat)
Apple Sauce (unsweetened & sprinkled with cinnamon)
Graham Crackers

- 3). Scrambled Eggs
Toast (whole grain)
Sliced Tomatoes
Frozen Blueberries (partially thawed)
Low Fat Vanilla Yogurt

- 4). Quesadillas (whole grain tortilla, grated cheese, chopped left over meat)
Black Beans (canned)

- Salsa (fresh from deli or jar)
Carrot Sticks
Bananas (tossed with honey & orange juice)

- 5). Stir Fry Vegetables & Beef (carrots, broccoli, bell pepper, onion, mushrooms & sliced or ground beef)
Rice (instant brown)
Pudding (low-fat instant or cups)
Fruit (fresh or canned in fruit juice or light syrup)

Let's Talk:

Children like a fun challenge, so make those nights when quick meals are a necessity a family challenge. Encourage all family members to suggest the foods they would like to eat on busy nights. Show everyone where the quick and easy menu ideas are posted and where the emergency-quick-to-cook foods are stored so they can help get the meal cooking. If they aren't old enough to help with preparing the food ask them to help set the table or put ready-to-eat foods like, crackers, salad dressing etc. on the table. Being part of the solution turns complainers into doers and builds teamwork

Recipe for Health:

Sir-Fry Vegetables & Beef

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients:

- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1 Tablespoon low sodium soy sauce
- 1/3 cup water
- 1 cup carrots, sliced
- 2 cups broccoli pieces
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 package fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
- ½ pound sliced beef or ½ pound lean ground beef

Directions:

1. Mix spices, soy sauce, cornstarch and water, set aside.
2. Wash vegetables. Slice carrots, broccoli and mushrooms. Chop onions and bell peppers.
3. Heat oil in large fry pan and add meat when oil is hot; stir until brown.
4. Push meat to one side. Add carrots, onions and peppers to the middle of the pan. Cook for one minute.
5. Add mushrooms and broccoli. Cook until tender.
6. Add spice-cornstarch mixture and cook until bubbly.
7. Reduce heat, cover pan and cook for two more minutes.

Serve with instant brown rice, low-fat pudding cups and in-season fresh fruit or canned Mandarin oranges.

Note: 3-4 cups of frozen stir-fry vegetables can be substituted for the fresh vegetables. Eight ounces of chicken strips or shrimp can be substituted for the beef. If using shrimp, add it after the spice-cornstarch mixture, cover pan and cook until shrimp is pink.