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Family Matters

Improving Health Together

October 2020 Newsletter

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Healthy and Quick Meals for Busy Families

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Family meals and healthy eating can be a struggle for families with busy lives. There are many reasons that families are not sharing a meal together. Families are often rushing and pulled in many different directions. Furthermore, it seems there are so many conflicts between kids' activities and parents' work schedules, not to mention social lives.

When it seems there just is no time for a family meal, we often turn to fast food to satisfy our hunger. Meals eaten in a car on the way to the next event has become the new normal. In order to avoid more guilt, remember eating together should be flexible. Eating on the go does not have to be unhealthy. With a little planning, quick meals can provide the nourishment our bodies need without all the fat, sugar and sodium that can be found in fast foods.

Parents continue to be the biggest influence on what children eat. Regular family meals offer many positive benefits for our families. Research continues to show that children who eat family meals tend to eat more fruits and vegetables, less saturated fat and less sodium. Not only is there nourishing food in a shared meal, families also report feeling more connected.

Sharing meals brings families together and relationships tend to be stronger. Being together, supporting each other and sharing contributes to the value and importance of family life. The benefits are well worth the effort to make family meals happen.

For those evenings that your family has crazy schedules, load food up in the cooler and take it with you. Think sandwiches or wraps, crackers and cheese, fresh fruit or even yogurt parfaits. Having healthy food available will make it less tempting to pick up fast food after a sports practice, ball game or other activity.



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Let children know that eating healthy meals together is important to you. However, you are going to need their help and cooperation to make it happen. With your family, talk over a plan of action. Sometimes it will be impossible to sit down to a family meal, so focus on the meals you can eat together and make those a priority. Also, set up some mealtime expectations such as keeping the meal pleasant instead of using it as a time to discipline or gripe. Additionally, setting aside phones and turning off the television helps everybody feel included and valued.

Look for recipes that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. Ask everyone to help you think of ideas. Include one-pot recipes, slow cooker recipes, or make ahead dinners. One-pot recipes are easy. All ingredients go into one pot and cook together. Think soups, stews, pastas, foil-wrapped meals, and even casseroles. Check out the one pot Skillet Lasagna recipe in this newsletter.

Who doesn't enjoy their slow cooker? Place the ingredients in the slow cooker in the morning and allow it to cook all day. Then, when you walk in the door, the aroma is welcoming. Remember food safety when using your slow cooker. Foods added to a slow cooker while still frozen delay the cooking process. Always thaw meat and poultry in the refrigerator before cooking in the slow cooker. This ensures foods are not at temperatures that allow bacteria to grow for an extended time.

Family meals don't always need to be dinner; breakfast and lunch also provide opportunities to eat meals together. These meals may even require less time to prepare and more time to spend together.

Recipe for Health

One Pot - Skillet Lasagna
Makes 8 - 1 cup servings

Ingredients

- ½ pound lean ground meat (beef, chicken or turkey)
- ½ onion, diced (about ½ cup)
- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed
- 1 can/jar (24 ounces) spaghetti or pasta sauce (or prepare your own)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup water
- 8 ounces whole-wheat egg noodles
- 1 can (4 ounces) mushrooms, drained, (or use fresh)
- 1 container (12 ounces) cottage cheese
- ½ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded



Instructions

1. Wash hands and all food contact surfaces.
2. Cook ground meat in a large skillet over medium heat, stirring continuously. Pour off excess grease, if needed.
3. Add chopped onions to the meat and cook until tender.
4. Add spinach, spaghetti sauce, garlic, and water to the skillet. Stir. Bring to a boil.
5. Add noodles. Stir until noodles are covered by liquid. Cover with a lid.
6. Turn heat to low and cook for 5 minutes.
7. Stir in mushrooms. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Add a small amount of water, if needed,
8. to prevent sticking, no more than ¼ cup at a time. Stir well.
9. Spoon cottage cheese over the top. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese. Do not stir.
10. Put the lid on and cook for 5 - 10 minutes until heated through and noodles are tender.

Recipe from: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/>