



Healthy Meals

Parent - Family Newsletter



March 2012

Weeknight Wonder Meals

How to build a quick and healthy dinner for your family



It's 6 p.m., you just got home from work, the kids are starving, and you haven't even started to think about what's for dinner. If you're like many busy families, you may be tempted to drive to the nearest fast food joint. Sure, it's quick, but regularly eating fast food (or most restaurant food, for that matter) can have a negative effect on your family's health.

Restaurant portions are generally two or three times the size of a single recommended serving. And even when the portions are reasonable, these quick

calories are still loaded with too much saturated fat and salt, and not enough essential nutrients—key ingredients that lead to childhood obesity.

According to Deborah Beauvais, a registered dietitian in Rochester, N.Y., and spokesperson for the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, time is the No. 1 excuse parents give for not putting a healthy meal on the dinner table. We can help. Check out the tips on the next page for building quick, healthy and delicious weeknight meals.



How to Deal With a Picky Eater

You put a healthy meal on the dinner table and your kids won't touch it. Frustrated? Keep your cool by asking your picky eater at least to try it. If she won't take another bite, drop the issue and offer her a peanut butter sandwich or banana instead. Then, try the new food again in a different way.

According to Deborah Beauvais, it takes kids eight to 10 tastes of a food before they can decide if it's one that they like or dislike. What's more, kids' tastes are always changing, so broccoli may be icky now, but in a month it may taste great.

Secrets to Serving Healthy Weeknight Meals

1. Plan your week: Beauvais recommends taking a few minutes each weekend to brainstorm meal ideas for the upcoming week. Plan out the menu as a family and don't forget to check what's being served at school to avoid a Taco Day and Night. Then, get the kids to help you check your pantry and refrigerator for ingredients you already have (get the kids to help) and add the foods you need to the grocery list.

2. Incorporate convenience foods: Don't be afraid to use convenience foods like bagged salads, canned soup and pre-cooked meats. Beauvais refers to these foods

as semi-homemade and says the bulk of families rely on at least some convenience foods to put dinner on the table. She cautions that some of these foods can be high in sodium, so check and compare labels at the store.

3. Keep a well-stocked pantry: Stock up with certain foods to ensure you have what you need to put a well-balanced meal on the table. Beauvais recommends these 10 healthy dinner staples: frozen vegetables, whole-wheat noodles, lean ground beef or turkey, milk, olive oil, bread (keep a loaf in the freezer, too), low-fat cheese, canned beans, eggs, and chicken breasts.


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4. Take small steps: To be successful, "you can't change everything at once," Beauvais says. Something as simple as paying attention to portion size or switching to a lower-fat milk can make a difference. Once you've gotten used to that small adjustment, build on it by making another change.

Homemade and Healthy

Beauvais shares some of her favorite weeknight meal ideas. Combined with a glass of low-fat or fat-free milk, each of these meals offers delicious, well-balanced nutrition to your family.



Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup

Make the sandwich using whole-grain bread (even the white variety will do) and reduced-fat cheese. Serve with a simple green salad and a cup of tomato soup for a quick and healthy meal.

Taco Bar

Fill tortillas with a protein, like lean ground beef, sliced chicken breast

or breaded fish filets, and then let family members pick favorite fillings. Set out toppings like grilled peppers and onions, shredded lettuce and chopped tomatoes, and avocado and mango slices.

Burgers and Fries

Comfort foods like burgers and fries don't have to be greasy. Grill lean ground beef (or turkey) patties, top with torn lettuce and tomato slices, and serve them on a whole-grain bun. Buy frozen French fries and bake, don't fry, them. Serve with fresh fruit.

Stir-Fry

Start with chunks of lean protein (steak, chicken, shrimp or tofu) and a

bag of frozen stir-fry vegetables. Toss with sauce and serve with brown rice.

Pasta Night

The possibilities are endless when it comes to pasta. Start with whole-wheat noodles and add a traditional meat or tomato sauce. Or, toss with frozen vegetables, chicken and a little olive oil and Parmesan cheese.

