

Eat Together, Eat Better

Who has time for family meals? You do! Actually finding the time to prepare and sit down to a meal together seems unimaginable with our busy schedules, but it's not. Though you might not have every day available to eat a meal together, take a look at your family's schedule and see if you can aim for at least two meals a week. Eventually, try to increase that to four meals on most weeks whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner. It doesn't have to be a complicated or fancy meal, either. Usually simple meals, which are family favorites or involve the kids and family in the prep are the easiest and least time consuming.

When adults and children eat together, children do better in school and have fewer behavioral problems. Teens are less likely to use alcohol or drugs and even say they like having time to talk to the adults in their lives. Communication between families improves and children/teens begin to understand and embrace family traditions and values. Since traditions and celebrations often involve meals and food, it can encourage kids to carry on these traditions when they begin families of their own.

Did you know that meals tend to be more nutritious and healthful when eaten together? Your food dollars go farther and time is better utilized because you cook only one meal. And it's great fun for the entire family to participate in the meal preparation. It not only teaches kids cooking skills but also builds healthy eating habits and a bond between family members. At the table, you're able to find out what's going on in each other's lives and reconnect, even if it's just for an hour or less. Of course all of this applies to the family without kids too. Even for a family of two, cooking and eating together has the same positive benefits and offers a wonderful opportunity to reconnect and strengthen the family bond.

***Cook Together *Talk Together *Celebrate Together**

10 tips for Quality Family Meals

1. Aim for 4 or more meals a week.
2. Make family mealy a priority.
3. Keep a sense of humor and laugh a lot
4. Cook it quick and eat it slow.
5. Work toward happy, relaxing conversations at meals.
6. If time is an issue, make meals quick and easy.
7. Shop for food and cook together.
8. Take phone calls later or shut it off!
9. Turn the TV off.
10. Respect each individual's right to decide how much to eat.

Easy Family Meal Recipes

Pesto English Muffins

Spread 4 slightly toasted English muffin halves with a spoonful of pesto. Top with scrambled eggs and shredded mozzarella (opt; soy cheese or leave out if don't do dairy)

Place under broiler until cheese melts and bubbles.

Nut Butter Oatmeal

Stir a spoonful of any nut butter into a bowl of plain cooked oatmeal.

Top with diced apples, crushed walnuts (or any nut), and agave syrup, maple syrup or honey, and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Fancy Grilled Cheese Sandwiches – serves 4

1 tbsp Butter

8 Slices whole wheat bread or Gluten free bread

1 Tbsp Dijon mustard

3/4 - 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese

1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored & sliced

8 strips cooked lean bacon or prosciutto (opt) or vegetarian bacon

Heat butter in large skillet over low heat. Slather 4 slices of bread w/ mustard, then divide the cheese, apples and bacon among them. Top with other bread slices and add to hot pan. Be patient ☐to ensure crisp crust and melted cheese, cook slowly until sandwich is deep brown and crunchy, about 10-12 minutes total.

Serve with tomato soup (or favorite soup) and green salad.

Busy Day Burritos – serves 4

4 (10in) whole wheat tortillas or 8 corn tortillas

1 can vegetarian refried pinto or black beans, stirred with ¼ cup salsa

1 cup favorite shredded cheese

2 cups shredded lettuce (mixed greens finely sliced add more nutrients or pre-shredded iceberg is also available)

Avocado or guacamole, light or non-fat yogurt or sour cream) and salsa

If using corn tortillas, soften between damp paper towel 10 sec. in microwave.

Place tortillas on flat surface and using equal amounts, spread with bean/salsa mixture. Divide the shredded cheese, shredded lettuce, avocado, yogurt/sour cream and salsa among the tortillas. (If using corn tortillas you'll divide equally among the eight. Add other toppings: black olives, tomatoes, shredded cooked chicken, etc. Roll up and enjoy.

Chicken Nuggets – serves 4

1 lb boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into nuggets or can use 1 lb chicken tenders

2-3 cups panko bread crumbs

1/3 cup grated parmesan (opt)

3 egg whites or 2 whole eggs, lightly beaten

1/4 tsp. each, garlic and onion powder

Preheat oven to 425.

Lightly oil or coat a large baking sheet with nonsick cook spray and set aside.

Place egg whites/eggs in shallow bowl. Combine crumbs with seasonings and place on plate. Season chicken with seasoning mixture and add a little salt if you want.

Dip chicken in egg, then coat with bread crumbs making sure to completely cover.

Place chicken on baking sheet and bake 10-12 minutes, until crumbs are browned and chicken is firm.

Dip “nuggets” into favorite dipping sauce. For sauce: combine honey & mustard, lite ranch, salsa, etc.

*Serve with Sweet Potato Fries and Coleslaw to complete the dinner.

Chocolate Dipped Fruit

Assorted fruit; fresh strawberries, pineapple, sliced mango and dried apricots

Dark Chocolate (75-95% cocoa) chips or bars.

Melt chocolate in microwave in increments of 15 seconds, stirring between until melted. Or place in double boiler and stir over low heat until melted. If using bars, break into pieces.

Use a mixture of fruit or a single fruit (listed above) and dip the end in melted chocolate. Swirling to remove excess.

Place on wax or parchment paper lined cookie sheet or plate and place in fridge until chocolate is firm.

Even if you only have one day a week you can eat or cook together as a family, make it special. You might even make it a whole day and include some family yoga and a movie or games. Who knows, you might find yourself at the family table more than you thought possible.

EAT WELL, LIVE WELL, LOVE WELL



