

It's Possible: Easier Family Meals

The research says it all. Children in homes where regular family meals are part of the routine are less likely to become involved with drugs, struggle with their weight, or get depressed.

Yes, we all lead busy lives, and no one said getting together for family meals is easy. That said, there *are* ways to make healthful meals at home a priority. There are even ways to make it easier. Here are some of the best...

Strategy #1: Pick a Meal and Team Up

The typical “family meal” is dinner, but if that doesn’t work for your family, try another meal. Put on a big pot of oatmeal for breakfast or have check-in time over an after-school snack of apples and peanut butter. Kids can help in the kitchen too — get everyone involved!

By focusing on one meal per day and teaming up, you increase your odds of success while reducing your workload. Starting slow and keeping steady are great ways to ensure that family meals become part of your routine.

Strategy #2: Cook Once, Serve Twice

This one is all about planning ahead.

On days that you have time to prepare a meal, consider making a double batch. Serve half for your family meal, then put the other half in the freezer for a day when you don’t have as much time to cook. This works especially well with beans, stews, and chilis.

You can also prepare a meal that makes great leftovers. For example, roast 2 chickens instead of one. Use the second



chicken for enchiladas, pot pies, or speedy sandwiches later in the week.

Strategy #3: Stock Up

It’s easier to get a meal on the table when you have ingredients on hand. Stock up on pantry staples when they go on sale and you’ll be able to cook up something tasty in a jiffy.

Stock your pantry with...

- Whole grain pasta
- Low-sodium pasta sauce
- Brown rice
- Canned beans
- Oatmeal
- Oils and vinegars
- Potatoes and sweet potatoes
- Onions and garlic
- Spices and dried herbs

Stock your freezer with...

- Frozen vegetables (skip the sauce)
- Frozen fruit (no sugar added)
- Ground poultry
- Veggie burgers

These can all augment the fresh fruits and vegetables that you pick up each week. What meals will you create?