



# Shopping for Family Meals

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Enjoying more family meals takes a little planning, but it's worth the effort. Children who eat with their families do better in school, are less likely to take part in risky behavior (such as smoking and drinking alcohol) and are less likely to have symptoms of depression.

Children who eat more family meals have an overall healthier diet, compared with children who eat fewer family meals. They eat more fruits, vegetables, grains and calcium-rich foods, and they drink fewer soft drinks.

Enjoy more family meals by taking some time to plan your menus and your shopping trips. Involve your family in menu planning, shopping, preparation and cleanup. Children can learn valuable life skills, such as cooking and communication skills, when helping in the kitchen. They learn to appreciate a variety of foods as they help plan and shop for meals.

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## Plan for Variety

Use the recommendations from MyPyramid to help guide your menu planning. Try these tips:

- Use store ads for menu ideas. Aim for a wide variety of foods from all the MyPyramid food groups and then write down menus for a week.
- Save your list of menu ideas, perhaps in a binder, and include the shopping list with the menus. You may want to recycle your menu ideas in a few weeks.
- Consider items on your menu that allow you to cook once and eat twice. For example, have a roast for Sunday dinner and roast beef sandwiches on Monday. Use planned-over grilled chicken in soups, fajitas or other dishes.
- Keep your list on your refrigerator so family members can add to the list during the week. Keep staple items, such as milk, eggs, bread and juice, on the list each week, and add needed items to the list. If you have access to a computer, consider using that when planning your meals.
- If you know the store layout well enough, make a list based on the layout with subheadings, such as "fresh produce," "canned goods," "meats" and "breads." Some grocery stores provide a map.
- Before you go to the store, have a snack. Otherwise, adding many items to your shopping cart is tempting.

- Involve all family members in the cooking, cleanup and planning process. You may want to make a list of “jobs” for them, too.
- Consider speed-scratch cooking, where you use some prepared mixes and dress them up with added ingredients. For example, add some vegetables and canned tuna to boxed macaroni and cheese for a quick casserole.

## Shop for Good Nutrition and Value

Some foods may seem like “good buys.” They may save time in the kitchen, but they may add extra fat, sugar and salt to your diet. They also may cost more. For example, frozen vegetables with added sauces usually cost more and are higher in fat and sodium, compared with plain frozen vegetables. Out-of-season fresh fruits, such as watermelon in January, usually cost more than in-season fruit.

## Safety Tips

- Shop for nonperishable items, such as canned and dry food, first, then shop for frozen and refrigerated items, such as meats, fish and dairy, so they spend less time out of cold storage.
- Avoid cross-contamination in your grocery cart by separating meat, fish and poultry items from ready-to-eat items, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. Put meat items in plastic bags and place them in a separate area of your grocery cart.
- Remember the rule: Keep cold foods cold! On warm days, bring a cooler to transport your refrigerated and frozen food home if you live a distance from the store.

## Learn at the Store

Many children go with their parents/caregivers to the grocery store. Parenting experts recommend parents/caregivers discuss the rules for behavior before entering the store. Enjoying a snack before shopping is a good idea for parents and children, too. Otherwise, everything at the store looks tasty.

Shopping provides a chance for parents/caregivers to teach children many things. Preschoolers, for example, can point out different colors of fruits and vegetables, and count objects. They can learn the names of different foods.

School-age children can help compare the nutritional value of foods. They can find items in the store, and they can learn to compare unit prices on foods.

## Make Family Meals a Priority

Schedule family meals on the family calendar. Make them a priority. Enjoy at least four family meals every week.

### Family Fitness Tip

Grocery shopping may seem like a chore, but it adds physical activity to your day.

- Adults should try to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week and children 60 minutes.
- When possible, park a distance from the front door of the store. If the store is close and you need only a few things, consider walking to the store. If you have a pedometer or step counter, wear it to the grocery store and see how many steps you add.

### My Family Meal Goal for Shopping

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# Recipes

## Quick Taco-Mac

- 1 pound ground beef or ground turkey
- ½ packet taco seasoning
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can whole tomatoes, undrained, or 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 c. water
- 1 box macaroni and cheese

In medium skillet, brown ground meat and stir until crumbly. Drain fat. If using canned whole tomatoes, cut or break up the tomatoes. Stir in rest of ingredients, including the cheese packet from the macaroni and cheese. Bring to a boil; reduce heat. Cover and simmer 20 minutes. Sprinkle with cheddar cheese, if desired.

*Makes six servings. Each serving has 247 calories, 25 grams (g) carbohydrate, 6.8 g fat and 1.4 g fiber.*

**Menu Idea:**  
Quick Taco-Mac, carrot sticks, apple slices and low-fat milk

## Quick Chicken Noodle and Vegetable Soup

- 4½ c. chicken broth (homemade or canned)
- ½ c. chopped onion
- ½ tsp. dried basil, crushed
- ½ tsp. dried oregano, crushed
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 1 10-ounce package frozen carrots and peas (or your choice)
- 1 c. cooked chicken, cubed
- ½ c. small egg noodles

Combine the chicken broth, onion and spices in a large saucepan. Add vegetables and pasta and bring ingredients to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer six to eight minutes until vegetables are crisp-tender. Stir in the chicken. Heat thoroughly.

*Makes six servings. Each serving has about 120 calories, 4 g fat, 9 g carbohydrate and 2 g fiber.*

**Menu Idea:**  
Chicken Noodle and Vegetable Soup, whole-grain crackers and cheese, canned peaches, low-fat milk

# Recipes

## Easy Pasta Bake

- 1 pound lean ground beef, browned
- 2 c. cooked pasta of choice\*
- 1 15-ounce jar spaghetti sauce
- ½ c. Parmesan cheese
- 1 c. mozzarella cheese

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Brown ground beef. Cook pasta according to package directions. Mix together browned ground beef, pasta, spaghetti sauce and Parmesan cheese, top with mozzarella cheese and place in a greased or sprayed 9-inch by 13-inch baking dish. Cover pan with foil. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes. Uncover and bake another 10 minutes, until internal temperature reaches at least 165 degrees.

*Makes six servings. Each serving has 300 calories, 23 g carbohydrate, 10 g fat and 1.4 g fiber.*

\*Try whole-grain pasta for a change of pace!

**Menu Idea:**  
Easy Pasta Bake,  
lettuce salad, red grapes  
and low-fat milk

## Eat Smart. Play Hard. Together

- For more information about food safety and nutrition, contact your county office of the NDSU Extension Service.
- Visit the NDSU Extension Service Web site [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm). (Click on “Nutrition” then “Kids & Nutrition” for parent/caregiver information, recipes and educational activities for children.)
- Visit [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) for more information about healthy eating for the entire family.
- Visit the USDA Eat Smart. Play Hard. Web sites:
  - For parents:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthylifestyle/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthylifestyle/)
  - For kids:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardkids/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardkids/)



“Eat Smart. Play Hard.” is an initiative of the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

For more information on this and other topics, see: [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu)

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