Back to School, Back to the Dinner Table!

With the flip of another calendar page, it's that time again. In some places, kids are headed back to class in just a week or two, others will wait until after Labor Day; either way, parents are planning. Among the top stress points that families name when asked what keeps them away from the table is school-year schedules. But does dinner really have to be moved to the back burner (ha, ha) for 2/3 of the year? Fortunately, the answer is no — or at least, not completely. While there’s always the chance that some evenings will really be so jam-packed that gathering the whole family for a meal is next to impossible, for most of us, it truly is possible to keep shared meals on the calendar. Here are some of our best tips to help you prepare for back-to-school meals

1: Plan Your Meals
Knowing in advance what you’re making for dinner makes grocery shopping easier & helps to streamline the evening routine. Since you’ll be able to make sure you have all the necessary ingredients on hand, there won’t be any last-minute scrambling, & planning ahead also means that you can choose quick meals for the busy evenings & save more time-intensive recipes for nights when you’ll have extra minutes to spare. If the task seems daunting to you, try using an app like Ziplist or Paprika to help you stay organized.

2. Learn to Make 5 “Fall Back” Meals
The “good enough” dinner really is good enough, especially if it keeps you from heading to the drive-thru. Fallback meals are ideally dinners you can make in under 20 minutes, with ingredients you often have on hand. A quick dinner of spaghetti with jarred (or homemade, frozen) marinara, an egg scramble with vegetables added, quesadillas or wraps using your family’s favorite fillings or whole-grain pancakes with a side of fruit salad are all examples of easy and tasty dinners that can get your family to the table in a hurry on busy nights.

3. Get A Slow Cooker (or take it out of storage!)
Most slow cooker recipes can be assembled the night before and refrigerated; then in the morning, all you have to do is pop the insert into the slow cooker base, turn it on and walk away. You’ll come home to a hot meal that’s ready to serve, which is perfect for nights when everybody needs to get fed and on their way for evening activities.

4. Try Some Make Ahead Meals.
Some recipes can be made on a Sunday afternoon, then heated and served on Monday or Tuesday. While dinner’s heating up, you can take some time to help the kids with their homework or catch up on emails so you’re ready to focus on conversation at dinnertime.

www.thefamilydinnerproject.org
One of the greatest things about family dinner is that it’s available to everyone. Unlike many other ways to boost the health and well-being of the whole family, raise kids’ grades and literacy skills and help defend against risky behavior like underage drinking, drug use, teen pregnancy and eating disorders, family dinner is something that you can do anytime right in your own home. Except, of course, for those evenings when you just can’t.

We get it: While family dinner really IS possible for many of us, most of the time (maybe with a little planning ahead), there are going to be times when getting everyone together at the table is an epic feat. For some families, scheduling crunches happen one or more nights during the week because of conflicting after-school activity schedules and work commitments. For others, the need to work evening shifts may make gathering the whole family for dinner a practical impossibility. So when it just can’t happen…should you give up on it altogether?

Absolutely not. The benefits of family dinners really boil down to the combination of three key ingredients: Food, fun and conversation. If you can create an experience that blends all three, then “dinner” isn’t necessary. Here are five ways to share a meal when the schedule seems impossible.

1. **Have Family Breakfast, Saturday Lunch or Sunday Brunch.**
   While eating together five or more times per week is the most desirable goal, ANY regularly scheduled family mealtimes will help you gain some of the benefits of shared meals. Choose at least one that will work well for everyone, and make it a standing appointment for all family members.

2. **Set Aside Snacktime.**
   Sitting down together to prepare and enjoy a snack — whether it’s a bite after school, a pre-dinner veggie tray before someone heads out the door, or a dessert before bedtime — can be just as rewarding as having a whole meal together. When time is tight, make a ritual out of the small moments. You may be surprised how much you enjoy it.

3. **Be Creative About Time and Space.**
   If sports practice or other evening activities are standing in your way, why not bring family dinner along? Pack a picnic of sandwiches or salads and fruit, and get to the field a little early to eat and talk together. Or make sure everyone enjoys a light, early meal together at home before the activities begin, and make a healthy snack available later in the evening to keep hunger at bay.

4. **Use Technology to Stay Connected**
   We first heard this tip from the military families we’ve met through our work with Blue Star Families. While technology at the table isn’t always our first choice, in this case it’s a winner: If a loved one is absent for family dinner because of work or travel obligations, try arranging to connect via Skype or FaceTime during all or part of your meal. That way they can participate in the conversation and fun, and you’ll be able to enjoy dinner “together”.

5. **Make Family “Pods”**
   There’s no substitute for having everyone present, but on truly busy nights, breaking the family into “pods” for dinner can be one way to keep food, fun and conversation on the calendar. Maybe one parent heats up the chili and eats with one or two kids; then when they’ve dashed out the door, the others arrive home and sit down for the “second shift.” A fun way to connect the two mealtimes could be to leave a set of conversation starters and a game on the table, so everyone enjoys the same experience at different times. Also, don’t forget about the occasional late straggler — if one family member is going to be coming home later and eating alone, make an effort to sit down with them and spend that time together!

Sometimes, scheduling can be tricky, but with a little creativity, shared meals can still make an appearance on your calendar.
HEALTHCARE CONSUMER SMARTS

The best way to keep your healthcare costs down is to stay as healthy as possible. You can't control heredity, but you can control what you do about your individual risk factors. For example, medical costs of those who do not exercise are significantly higher than those who do. Yet, 60% of Americans do not exercise enough to benefit their health. In fact, 25% do not exercise at all. The average costs for those who are overweight are 21% higher — that's even more than the average increase in costs from smoking. Taking better care of yourself is better for you, your family and your budget.

Foods From A to Z – “Y” Foods

Yam – Native to Africa and Asia, there are currently over 600 varieties of yams. They have a lower glycemic index percentage than traditional potatoes, and 1 cup provides 34% of RDA for potassium, 24% fiber, 24% Vit B6 and 42% Vit C.

Yam Bean – is more commonly known as Jicama and is native to Mexico. Spainards spread this plant to the Philippines & China. Yam Beans are high in carbohydrates in the form of fiber, are 86-90% water and have 24% RDA of Vit C.

Yuca – also known as Cassava, are native to South America and are the 3rd largest source of Carbohydrate foods. When dried to a powdery extract it is known as tapioca. 1 cup of Yuca provides 14% fiber, 15% potassium and 70% Vitamin C.

Yuzu – also known as Citrus Junos and Yuja, originated in China and Tibet. Has similar properties to lemons and oranges and is used in a variety of sauces. The zest can also be used to flavor dishes. Yuzu has 3 times more Vitamin C than lemons!

Food Smarts

Count on calories –
According the National Institute for Health, the average moderately active adult woman needs about 1800 calories daily; an adult male, about 2300. If you’re sedentary, subtract about 200 calories from your daily allotment; if you’re extremely active, add up to 400.

Safety Smarts

Swimming safety –
Watch out for the dangerous “too’s” when swimming: too tired, too cold, too far from shore, too much sun and too much strenuous activity. Do not swim alone. Swim in designated areas only.
Recipe of the Month

Cauliflower Fried Rice

www.healthfortoday.net

4 cups cauliflower, chopped very fine
2 Green onions, sliced
1 Large Carrot, shredded
1 cup broccoli, chopped very fine
½ to 1 cup Vegetable broth
1 Clove Garlic, minced
1 Tbsp Braggs Liquid Aminos or light soy sauce
Pinch of salt to taste

Sauté green onions and garlic with vegetable broth for 2 to 3 minutes. Add cauliflower and other vegetables, stir and cook until soft (about 5 to 6 minutes). Add liquid aminos or soy sauce and salt to taste.

August

National Breastfeeding Month
www.usbreastfeeding.org

Gastroparesis Awareness Month
http://aboutgastroparesis.org

National Immunization Awareness Month
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niam/default.htm

National Health Center Week (Aug 7-13)
www.healthcenterweek.org

Run/Walk Events

SAR Wild Run
Aug 13 ~ Shaver Lake
http://www.sarwildrun.com/

China Peak Mud Run
Aug 19 ~ China Peak
http://www.skichinapeak.com/mud-run

Campus Life 5k
Aug 26 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/CampusLife5k

Wascally Wabbit Half Marathon
Sept 23 ~ Woodward Park
http://thewascally.com/

Shaver Lake Triathlon
Sept 30 ~ Shaver Lake
http://www.sierracascades.com

Komen Central Valley Race for the Cure
Oct 1 ~ Chuckchansi Park
http://www.info-komen.org

Monster Mash Halloween Run
Oct 28 ~ Woodward Park
http://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/MonsterMashDashHalloweenRun

Two Cities Marathon
Nov 5 ~ Woodward Park
http://www.twocitiesmarathon.com

August Birthdays

Aug 7 – Noemi Ramos
Aug 8 – Veronica Castillo
Aug 12 – Mario Valencia
Aug 24 – Claudia Mendoza
Aug 27 – Cynthia Munoz

Happy Birthday

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