Healthy Meal Makeovers

Children are important to the future and our goal should be to help them learn healthy habits, obtain nutrients needed for growth and development, avoid chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, and enjoy healthy eating. Helping children can start in your own kitchen by serving healthier foods. Don’t know where to start? Use this handout to discover ideas on how to make your meals healthier.

5 Tips to Makeover Any Meal
1) Add more fruits and vegetables
2) Use whole grains
3) Choose healthy cooking methods
4) Select lean proteins and low-fat or fat-free dairy products
5) Limit salt, added sugar, and high fat foods

Plan It Out
When you have planned out what you are going to eat and have taken the necessary steps to prepare, you are more likely to eat healthy.

♦ Check the ads for foods on sale to implement into your meal plan.
♦ Make a meal plan and grocery list to save time and money. You won’t be going to the grocery store as often because you have all the foods you need. You are also more likely to stick with the healthier foods you already planned.
♦ Grocery store—if you buy it, you eat it, so choose wisely. Don’t go to the store hungry. Focus on foods around the perimeter of the store. Look at and compare labels to choose healthier options.

Pre-Meal Preparation
Meal preparation can be time consuming. Save time during the week by prepping once a week on a day when you have a little extra time.

♦ Chop vegetables like carrots, onions, and celery and store in an air-tight container in the fridge until you are ready to use them.
♦ Wash, stem, and bag grapes, carrots, and other fruits and vegetables into snack-size portions.
♦ Make muffins and freeze them. When desired, warm them up in the microwave or set out to thaw.
♦ Cut up fruit the night before to serve at breakfast.

Compare Food Labels
Look at the food labels when deciding whether or not to buy a certain product or when comparing two similar products. The healthier choice will have less total fat, saturated fat, sodium, sugar, calories, and no trans fats. Also, check for more fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Look for whole grains on the ingredient list.
Healthy Cooking Methods

Choose healthy cooking methods to makeover your meals.

- Steam vegetables instead of boiling in a pot of water.
- Bake fries and chicken nuggets instead of frying them.
- Microwave frozen vegetables with little or no water to help keep the nutrients in the food.
- Grill or broil meats to allow some of the fat to drip off.
- Stir-fry or sauté foods to cook quickly and avoid nutrient loss.

Boost Vegetables

Puree or shredded vegetables to boost the nutrients in your meal without anyone noticing.

- Puree carrots, celery, and peas to add to a pasta sauce.
- Use grated zucchini in muffins, quick breads, and pancakes.
- Add shredded carrots or other vegetables to lasagna layers.
- Add blended potatoes or cauliflower to soups or stews to help thicken them.

Substitute Ingredients

Make cooking or baking substitutions for ingredients that are high in fat, sodium, and sugar.

- Use low-fat, plain yogurt in place of sour cream.
- Substitute applesauce for 1/2 the oil called for in baking recipes.
- Use garlic powder instead of garlic salt and low-sodium soy sauce instead of regular.
- Decrease sugar in recipes by 1/4, especially if you are using something sweet like applesauce in the recipe.

Revamp Your Recipes

Here are some ideas of how to make children’s favorites a bit healthier.

- Tacos: use lean ground beef and rinse to drain off excess fat; add beans; use homemade or reduced-sodium taco seasoning; serve with whole wheat tortillas, a lot of vegetables, and reduced-fat cheese
- Pasta: choose whole grain pasta; limit cream sauces or use low-fat milk and a thickener to make healthier cream sauces; puree vegetables to use as a sauce or to help thicken a sauce
- Chinese: Use fresh ingredients such as ginger and garlic for sauces instead of stir-fry sauces; choose low-sodium soy sauce and broth; add vegetables to meat dishes; serve with brown rice
- Lasagna: use lean ground beef and rinse to drain off excess fat; add shredded vegetables or chopped spinach between layers; instead of cheese between each layer, use reduced-fat cheese only on the top layer; look for whole grain lasagna noodles
- Chicken Nuggets: make the nuggets from scratch; bake or microwave—don’t fry them; use egg whites and whole grain breadcrumbs or cereal to coat them
- Pizza: choose a whole wheat crust; use seasoned tomato sauce for the sauce; top with a smaller amount of reduced-fat cheese; load up on vegetable toppings; limit pepperoni, sausage, and other high-fat, high-calorie toppings; serve fruits and vegetables on the side

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