



Shaping Up America's Kitchens!

Your Toolbox for Building a Healthier Family

I promise Mom...I'll be downstairs for dinner as soon as my favorite TV show ends. Honey...don't forget we need to be at the neighbor's house by 7! Sound familiar? Many families have such jam-packed schedules and differing priorities that it's challenging to enjoy healthy meals together. Plus, mom's often are left with all the mealtime work! It doesn't have to be this way! Planning ahead, getting your family involved in planning and preparing meals, and making eating together fun, can make mealtime an event no one wants to miss. Eating as a family helps build healthier, happier kids.

Tools help you perform tasks faster, easier, and better.

This Factivity Folio will give you the tools to make regular family meals a reality and make them a time for nourishing your family's



body and soul!

Mealtime Matters Factivity Folio #4

Why bother?

Family mealtimes pay huge dividends in health and well-being. When a parent is present, meals often include more fruits, vegetables, and grains and fewer soft drinks. Other bonuses of regular family meals are that kids tend to be happier, feel more connected to the family, and do better in school. Plus, regular family meals reduce the chances that kids will drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes or marijuana. Remember, healthy family meals build healthier, stronger families!

Action Step: Make Family Mealtime Priority

At first, it may seem challenging to get everyone to the same table at the same time! With patience and persistence, it can become a natural part of your family's routine. Keep in mind that family meals don't have to be at dinnertime—breakfast or weekend lunches may be a better solution for your family.

Analyze the Situation

What will you serve?

Making regular family meals a reality means planning ahead—what will you serve? how will your family help? what will entice everyone to want to eat together? Without a plan, it's easy to revert to old habits and miss the opportunity share meals. Just remember the old adage, ***"if it is to be, it is up to me."*** So, take a deep breath and put your plan in action.



- Quickly review your meal plans from Factivity Folio #3. For your menu today, consider what needs to be done first, second, and so on. Save time by thinking about this while driving to work, taking a shower, or running errands.
- Get out all ingredients and equipment before starting. With a 'to do' list, kids can get ingredients out after school, set the table, or prepare simple menu items. This is a great way to get them involved and looking forward to mealtime.
- On the busiest days, save clean-up time with paper plates, napkins, and plastic utensils. Try disposable cutting sheets. Use cooking bags. Line pans with foil.
- Afterwards, critique the meal. Did your plan go as you expected? Was the meal served on time? Were the hot foods hot and cold foods cold? Did most everyone make it to the meal? Did everyone enjoy the meal? What adjustments will you make next time to make your meals even better and more inviting?

Mealtime is about sharing – not only food, but your hopes, dreams, and values!

Get your family on board for health-smart meals!

Changes, even changes for the better, are hard for most people. Start small:

- switch from frozen pizza with the works to cheese pizza and top with chopped vegetables
- use quick-cooking brown rice instead of white rice.
- add tender young vegetables, like sugar peas and baby carrots, to the menu
- serve raw broccoli florets and sweet pepper strips with a low-fat dip
- slice up fruit and serve with low-fat coconut or lemon yogurt as a dip



How will you make meal preparation a family affair?

Everybody likes to have fun and feel satisfied with their work. If you think of meal preparation as a chore, it's time to tone that attitude! Otherwise, it will be hard to

convince your family to help in the kitchen! So, make the decision to approach meal preparation as a fun activity the whole family can enjoy. This decision is easier when you consider the benefits.

- Kids are naturally interested in food and cooking—by helping in the kitchen they quickly learn valuable life skills from watching and doing!
- Working side-by-side in the kitchen with your children is a great way to show them the value you place on healthy eating and food safety.
- Cooking gives kids first-hand experience with colors, textures, aromas, and flavors of foods.
- If you have fussy eaters, it's especially important to get them involved. When they help in the kitchen, they are more likely to eat the foods served. Another way to get them involved is to plant a small garden (even a large flower pot will do). Lettuce and other greens grow quickly and are a delicious addition to meals.
- Sharing meal preparation time can promote family bonding—use it to chat with your children and catch up on topics important to them.
- A delicious benefit is that everyone gets to share the results of working together in the kitchen!



Try to make preparing meals together a regular event. If weeknights are too hectic, consider using weekend time to cook a big meal as a family and then freeze leftovers for weekday family meals.

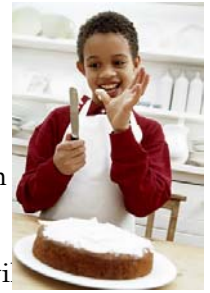


Did You Know?

Families who eat together often (especially with the TV off!) have the healthiest diets?

Kids in the Kitchen

When children first get involved with meal preparation, it may seem like it's more trouble than it's worth—but that's only in the short run! Think about the future when they are able to take responsibility for preparing a menu item or making an entire meal without supervision! Also, think about the fact that you are teaching them skills that will protect their lifelong health (and your future grandkids' health). **Here's how to keep meal preparation fun and productive.**



1. **Be safety conscious.** Clean hands, clean cutting surfaces, and clean kitchen tools and equipment help keep food safe to eat.
2. **Be lively.** Make cooking a fun-filled adventure. A positive atmosphere helps grab the interest of your child.
3. **Make your children shine.** Choose tasks that are age appropriate and challenging for your children, but not so challenging that they get frustrated.
 - Let **preschoolers** make simple table decorations, fold napkins, count out silverware, and help set the table.
 - Give **young children** simple meal preparation tasks like spinning the salad greens, mixing batter, pouring water, or arranging canned fruit on a serving tray.
 - Start **tweens** with simple meal preparation activities like microwaving vegetables and assembling casserole ingredients.
 - Have **teens** become responsible for one dinner a week—from planning to preparation and even clean-up. Call it “*Kids Rule*”
4. **Enjoy the journey.** Show children how to perform the task. Be prepared to answer questions and show them several times. Remember, patience and positive feedback are key—the reward of seeing your children grow and develop is worth this small time investment!
5. **Keep it exciting.** Give your child only one or two food prep tasks at each meal, but vary the tasks often. This will keep them on their toes and eager to learn more.
6. **Keep it fun.** To get kids to wash their hands until they are clean, sing “Happy Birthday” twice. Try slicing fruit in different shapes. Spark interest in eating a new food by making up funny stories or riddles about it. Wear shirts to dinner that match the color of the vegetable served that day. Look for interesting table decorations like pinecones and acorns. Even clean-up can be fun—make a checklist and add smiley faces when each task is completed.
7. **Say thank you!** Kids like to hear ‘thanks’ as much as adults! Be sure to praise children’s efforts and tell them how much you value their help.



How will you make mealtime an event no one wants to miss?

- ✓ Set a regular family mealtime. The whole family can pick the time together.
- ✓ Keep snacks from dampening mealtime appetites. Separate snacktime from mealtime by at least 2 hours.
- ✓ Clear away clutter, turn off television and cell phones, and turn on soothing music.
- ✓ Add simple touches like candles, wildflowers, colorful napkins, or straws to beverages.



- ✓ Make it easy for kids to find healthy foods at home and give them lots of opportunities to try them. Persistence often pays off—it may take 8 times or more before kids will accept a new food. Sometimes, though, a child may never develop a liking for a food. If so, respect the child's feelings.
- ✓ Remember, no food is a 'must eat'. Let kids decide how much to eat—pressuring them only creates negative feelings.



- ✓ Make eating the foods served at mealtime an expectation for the whole family! Kids are smart—they will quickly learn this is an expectation or that they can manipulate you to make them special meals. Preparing special meals for picky eaters will set the stage for mom and dad to become short-order cooks.
- ✓ Watch portion sizes! The amount you eat can greatly affect the overall healthfulness of a meal or snack. Smaller plates (7 to 9-inches in diameter) look fuller with less food—a great way to trim portion sizes! Serve water in large glasses and juice in 3 to 4 ounce glasses. Serving snacks in small cups helps keep portions under control and stops mindless overeating.
- ✓ Don't make a fuss over your fussy eater. Kids quickly learn that refusing to eat gets them lots of attention. It's also a good idea to not talk about eating behavior in front of kids.
- ✓ Keep table time realistic—even 15 minutes together can be valuable. To have more table time, opt for simple healthy meals that can be prepared and served quickly.

- ✓ Make mealtime a sit-down event. Arrange chairs so that everyone can see each other. By sitting down to eat, there is less danger of choking. Plus, it provides time for everyone to focus on eating and each other.



- ✓ Come to meals with a relaxed and positive frame of mind. And, make it a point to enjoy each other's company.
- ✓ Save serious discussions for other times—focus on pleasant topics, like upcoming weekend plans or after school activities. Make sure everyone has a chance to talk so they feel involved with the family dinner.
- ✓ Parents greatly influence their kids' food choices. Be a role model at mealtime—show your family you eat and enjoy healthy foods.



Cooking Tips for Kids

Many kids enjoy preparing snacks for themselves and helping prepare family meals. Tips like these help keep things running smoothly and safely!

- 🕒 Wash hands thoroughly with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before starting to cook.
- 🕒 Roll up sleeves. Tie back long hair in a pony tail or wear a hat.
- 🕒 Wear an apron or old clothes when making a messy food.
- 🕒 Be safe: handle sharp knives carefully; use potholder to remove items from the stovetop or oven; turn oven and stovetop dials to "off" when finished cooking.
- 🕒 Leave the kitchen neat and tidy by washing the dishes that were used (or putting them in the dishwasher) and wiping off counters.



Now that you have analyzed the situation, it's time to get to work!

Mealtime Matters Assessment

1. Ask Yourself	Yes	No	If no, what are my plans for improvement?
Do I have a "to do" list ready for today's family meal?			
Have I planned for how to get the family involved with mealtime preparation?			
Do I encourage my children to help in the kitchen?			
Am I able to delegate kitchen tasks to my children and patiently teach them how to complete the task?			
Do I make family mealtimes a top priority?			
Is the family dinner table clear of clutter and ready for mealtime?			
Is family mealtime a positive experience for my family?			
Does the family take time to talk during the meal and enjoy each other's company?			

2. How many days this the week will we be able to have sit-down family meals? _____

3. How much time will I allot to teaching my child food safety and cooking skills? _____

4. How can I get my family involved? Make a list of tasks that are age appropriate for each family member. Consider posting this in the kitchen and changing tasks regularly.

a. Tasks for Preparing the Meal:

b. Tasks for Getting the Dining Area Ready for Mealtime:

c. Tasks for Cleaning Up the Dining Area and Kitchen:

5. When it's time to prepare and serve a family meal, I will motivate myself and the family to follow through by:

6. The strategies I will use to get my family on board for making family mealtimes a priority are:

7. The date I will start on this goal is _____ I will complete this goal on: _____