



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Family Matters

Improving Health Together

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Meal Planning Can be Fun for Everyone

By Carla Farrand, Family and Consumer Science Specialist, Garfield County

Winter nights are the perfect time to work together as a family to plan and prepare nutritious and easy meals. Meal planning doesn't have to be overwhelming. Having everyone help can turn meal planning into a positive and enjoyable family activity.



Meal Planning Basics

Consider these six tips when planning meals.

- **Weekly schedule.** Have a family meeting to plan out the week's schedule of events and activities.
- **Use a meal planning tool.** You can use a simple notebook or a full-on [planning tool](#) that has prompts for each day of the week. You can choose to plan just evening meals, or all meals and snacks. Take time at family meetings to let each person help in the process of planning meals.
- **Nutrition** - When planning meals, include a variety of foods from each food group:
 - Incorporate plenty of fruits and vegetables
 - Choose whole grains such as brown rice, whole-wheat bread, or oatmeal
 - Select lean proteins such as legumes, beans, tofu, nuts and seeds, fish, skinless chicken, or lean cuts of meat
 - Include a non-fat, low-fat, or nondairy option
- **Inventory.** Create an inventory of food items and ingredients that you have in your pantry, freezer, and refrigerator.
- **Select Recipes.** By selecting recipes including the foods you already have, you can save money.
- **Shopping List.** Create a shopping list of items that will be needed to prepare the meals/recipes you choose. Planning helps save time, money, and food from going to waste.

Finding Recipes

Finding and creating family recipes can be a lot of fun. Connecting with <https://myplate.gov> can help you plan healthy meals on a budget.

Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

As a young person, I enjoyed when my family would get together to plan meals. I carried this tradition forward to my children, so that they helped plan our dinner meals. This activity helped my children learn to create healthy meals and many happy memories. When children have a say in meal planning, you honor their preferences and opinions. This positive focused time can create future opportunities to have some difficult conversations while planning or cooking.

Recipe for Health Creating a Family Soup Recipe

Ingredient Options

Base

- 2 to 3 cups water
- 4 cups Chicken, Beef or Vegetable Broth
- Can of tomatoes plus 1-2 cups of water

Protein (choose one or a combination)

- 1/2 pound cooked or 12oz raw meat or poultry
- 2 cups cooked lentils, beans, or split peas
- 12 to 16 ounces Tofu
- 4 ounces nuts, seeds

Vegetables

- 3 cups chopped, pureed, fresh, frozen, or canned

Grain or Noodles (Choose one)

- 2/3 cup uncooked barley or brown rice
- 8 ounces dried pasta, noodles, or dumplings

Herbs, Spices, and aromatic vegetables

- Garlic, onions, cardamon, coriander, paprika, curry, nutmeg, basil, oregano, thyme, chives, etc.

Directions:

1. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
2. Add 1 tablespoon vegetable oil to soup pot and heat on medium heat. Sauté onion, until translucent. Add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds.
3. Add water and broth.
4. If you are using uncooked barley or rice, add it now. Add more water or broth as needed.
5. Add spices and dried herbs.
6. If you choose vegetables that take a while to soften, such as raw carrots or potatoes add them now.
7. Add any protein such as ground beef, chopped boneless/skinless chicken thigh, sausage, dried lentils, canned beans, or split peas.
8. Bring soup to a boil, then lower to a simmer covered for a minimum of 15-20 minutes or until protein is cooked (beef 145F, chicken or sausage 165F).
9. If you are using uncooked pasta, add it towards the last 8-10 minutes of cooking time.
10. Add canned, precooked, or quick cooking fresh vegetables such as peas, zucchini, or spinach during the last 8-10 minutes of cooking.
11. If you are using cooked pasta, thin noodles or dumplings that cook for only a few minutes, add it towards the last 2-3 minutes.
12. Add the fresh herbs, if using, at the last 2-3 minutes.
Taste the soup and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.

Be sure to write down the ingredients you used. Who knows, it might become a family favorite for years to come!

“Let's make soup!”



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