



Healthy eating for busy families

Eating healthy can be challenging and overwhelming, especially when trying to balance work, family needs, and a social life. While it might seem easier to go to the nearest drive-through or buy packaged and pre-made foods, these types of food are often filled with added sugars and trans fats. However, there are some easy lifestyle adjustments that can make healthy meals and snacks just as easy of an option.

Pick your recipes first

Pick one day of the week or every other week, when you know you will have a few hours free to choose recipes to make, go grocery shopping, and then “meal-prep”.

Start by selecting three or four recipes that are simple and will last the week; this should take no more than 15 minutes. When choosing recipes, try and pick those that have at least two vegetables included. Pinterest and Foodgawker.com are excellent resources for finding recipes. There are thousands of different recipes available and the search function makes it easy to find options to suit all dietary needs.

Here are a few easy meal and snack ideas that can get you started:

- Slow cooker soup, stews, chili
- One pan roasted vegetables and protein (chicken or fish)
- Hard boiled eggs
- Stir-fry
- Vegetables and hummus

Once you have the recipes, it can be beneficial to write out your weekly meals using a planner.

Shop for your ingredients next

Based on the recipes chosen, make a list of groceries you will need and head to the store. Having a grocery list will ensure you only buy what you need, and prevent you from wasting time aimlessly wandering. This will save you money and time.

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A good rule of thumb when grocery shopping is to shop the perimeter of the store. The perimeter is where you will find fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, and eggs are located. To help speed up your meal preparation at home, you might want to opt for pre-cut fruits and vegetables. Most grocery stores have produce such as squash, sweet potatoes, parsnips, broccoli, cauliflower and melons already chopped. Some stores also carry peeled garlic, riced cauliflower, microwave ready green beans, and frozen chopped onions. Stocking your freezer with frozen fruits and vegetables can also be a time saver for those weeks when you don't have the time to get to the grocery store.

Time to cook!

Now, you can begin preparing the foods you will need to make your recipes. Chop any fruits and vegetables that were not pre-cut, steam or roast these, and cook grains like rice or quinoa. This will speed up the cooking process when you want to make meals for your family. Consider doubling the recipe so that you will have leftovers, which can then be packed for lunch or eaten as dinner another day of the week.

Read the ingredient list

For those times when you will not be able to meal plan for the week, make sure you read the ingredient list on pre-prepared products. You should be able to pronounce everything on the list, and have a general idea of what each ingredient is. Try and avoid added sugars and steer clear of anything with trans fats.

Make it a family affair

Making healthy choices for you and your family requires some time and planning, but involving the whole family can make the process less daunting. Get creative with the meals, have your kids help pick the recipes and get them involved in the grocery shopping and cooking process. This way it can become a fun family activity!

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How much sleep do you really need?

Laying awake for hours trying to fall asleep, waking up several times throughout the night, pushing yourself to stay awake or waking up early to get more work done: these are all common experiences. New studies show that on average, adults are not getting as much sleep as what is recommended for good health. Common knowledge decrees that you should be getting eight hours of sleep a night, but how true is this? Below we will look at the importance of getting enough sleep, getting quality sleep, and how to improve your sleep.

Sleep for the old, sleep for the young

The amount of sleep you need depends on your age, and lessens as you get older. Infants need the most sleep and as children age, they begin to need less and less. Healthy adults generally need between **seven and nine** hours of uninterrupted sleep, and often we are not getting it, as many adults report only getting five or six hours of sleep a night. Older adults at age 65+ begin to need slightly less sleep, but still normally require seven to eight hours.

Waking often, staying awake

New studies suggest that waking up over and over again throughout the night is just as detrimental to your health and your mood as getting fewer hours of sleep overall. This means that even if you have dedicated eight hours of your night to “sleeping”, if you find yourself waking up a lot, you are not seeing the benefits of good sleep, and may even be suffering some of the negative fallout symptoms of not sleeping enough.

Bad sleep means a bad mood

When you get very little sleep, on days where you needed to get up very early to travel, or stayed up too late finishing an assignment, you probably have noticed that your mood is negatively affected. You might be irritable, extra-sensitive and weepy, and have less patience than normal. While these effects on your mood are apparent, your mood is also being affected when you aren’t getting enough sleep on a daily basis, even if it is just a little less sleep than you actually need. Lack of sleep accumulates and can negatively affect your day-to-day mood and even lead to mental health problems like anxiety and depression.

Top tips for best sleep

Now that you understand how important solid uninterrupted sleep is, how do you make sure you are actually getting it? There are some very easy and effective steps you can take to improve your sleep. These all fall under what is known as **sleep hygiene**, a set of habits that you can adhere to sleep better and longer.

Stick to a schedule: Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day allows your body to settle into a rhythm. Try to stick to the schedule daily and if you stay up late or sleep in on the weekend, it should only vary by a margin of about an hour.

Make your bed sleep ready: Make the space you sleep in a space that is really for sleeping. Minimize the amount of technology that is close to your bed – that includes mobile phones, tablets, computers and TV. Try not to do other things in bed such as work or watching movies.

Eliminate distractions before bed: An hour before bedtime, stop emailing, texting and checking social media. Try not to watch any suspenseful or exciting television programs. All of this is stimulating and will make it harder to fall asleep.

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Exercise early and often: Regular exercise greatly improves your sleep. But finish up at least 90 minutes before you go to bed or you can actually wake your body up and make falling asleep more difficult.

Create a relaxing pre-sleep ritual: It might be having a bath or reading a book, or lighting a candle. Come up with some set of actions that welcomes rest and relaxation to do before bedtime.

As common as it is, bad sleep does not need to be a given reality. Implementing the above suggestions takes attention and discipline but they are proven to improve your sleep time and sleep quality. If you still find that you are waking up constantly or not falling asleep at all, you may have a more serious sleep condition and should talk to a medical professional to ensure that you are on the road to the best possible sleep.

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