

DELICIOUS MEALS IN MINUTES

In today's busy world, it's important for us to prepare fast, nutritious meals that appeal to our families and fit within the family budget. But delicious, appetizing meals don't just happen. They have to be planned.



Spend time each week planning and organizing your meals. Using a notepad, pencil, cookbooks, and grocery ads allows you to make menus and a shopping list at

the same time. When you know what and how much of an item you need to purchase, all shopping can be done at once. While shopping, reading the *Nutrition Facts Label* and ingredients list will assist you in planning serving amounts and nutrient intake.

The web site MyPyramid.gov is a good place to start when planning nutritious meals. Begin with a main dish that gives each family member one serving of meat. Add a complementary food from the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group. Include a hot or cold vegetable and choose a fruit or vegetable salad that complements the main dish. Finish with a dessert such as fresh fruit or a milk or yogurt-based pudding, custard, or malt. Also, select a hot or cold beverage – remembering to meet the daily milk requirement.

Serving nutritious meals will be useless if the food is bland or unattractive. A delicious meal depends on a blend of flavors, textures, temperature, and a variety of colors and shapes. A pleasant table setting also enhances the appearance of food.

To prepare your meal, assemble all the ingredients and equipment you need first. Clean and chop all vegetables and open all cans and packages one time. Make sure to read the recipe completely from start to finish. To have all recipes ready at the same time, work backwards from cooking and preparation times. Keep your kitchen clean as you go to help avoid confusion.

Organization is the best tool you have to save time. Store your utensils and equipment close to where you will use them and in an orderly manner so they are easy to find and use. Purchase equipment that can be used for more than one job, such as from freezer-to-oven-to-table bakeware. Avoid buying hard-to-clean items or those which break, rust, or stain easily. A food processor, blender, or microwave oven saves time, but only if you know how to use them.

START WITH A STOCK



Stocks form the base for most soups, and having some on hand will allow you to use your imagination and what's in your refrigerator to put together a quick, tasty, and healthy meal. Allow about one cup of stock per person.

CHUNKY VEGETABLE AND PASTA SOUP: Peel and dice **1 medium tomato**; chop and peel **1 cucumber or zucchini**; chop **2 tablespoons green pepper**; and slice **2 mushrooms**. Add **¼ cup small shell macaroni or pastina** (tiny pasta shapes) to **4 cups of boiling vegetable stock** and simmer until pasta is partially cooked, about 4 minutes. Add vegetables and continue to simmer until the vegetables are crisp-tender. Season with **salt and pepper**.

ORIENTAL STYLE SOUP: Slice **4 green onions**; finely chop **1 small clove garlic**; and peel and finely chop **½-inch piece of ginger root**. Add the onions, garlic, and ginger, **1 teaspoon soy sauce** and **1 teaspoon chili flakes** to **4 cups of boiling fish or vegetable stock**. Add **½ cup cooked chopped shrimp or one 6½-ounce can chopped clams**, drained. Simmer 2 minutes and garnish with **cilantro**. For a more hearty soup, add **¼ cup of cooked, wide egg noodles**.

LIMA BEAN SOUP: Chop **1 medium-size yellow onion** and slice **2 bratwurst or other mild cooked sausage or ½ pound ham shank**. Add the onion and sausage to **4 cups of boiling chicken stock**. Add **one 16-ounce can lima beans**, drained, and add **1 crushed garlic clove**. Simmer until the onion is tender and the sausage is steaming throughout, about 5 minutes. Season with **salt and pepper**. Split peas or other beans may be substituted for lima beans.

CHICKEN OR TURKEY SOUP: Thinly slice **1 small carrot**, **½ small leek or onion**, and **1 small stalk celery**. Cut **6 ounces of skinned and boned chicken breast or turkey** into thin slices. Add to **4 cups boiling chicken stock** and simmer for 2 minutes. Add the vegetables and simmer until the chicken is cooked through and the vegetables are crisp-tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Garnish with **1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley** and season with **salt and pepper**.

START WITH PASTA



Pasta is the perfect staple to have on hand for a quick dinner for family or guests. Simple sauces can be cooked and added before the pasta is finished cooking. Try meat sauce, cheese sauce, clam sauce, marinara sauce, broccoli pesto sauce, or mushroom-zucchini sauce. A general rule of which shape of pasta to use is that thinner sauces should be served with the longer, finer pastas and thicker sauces should be served with short pastas. One pound of dried pasta will make four entree servings.

START WITH A ROASTED CHICKEN



A roasted chicken is a great start to a quick and nutritious meal. A fully cooked 3½-pound chicken will serve four. Either cook your own or buy one already cooked from the grocery. Remove the skin and bones from the chicken before using it in your recipe.

CHICKEN SALAD CROISSANTS: Dice the meat of 1 roasted chicken. Finely chop 1 cup celery; drain ¼ cup crushed pineapple; chop 2 tablespoons pimento; drain and chop an 8-ounce can water chestnuts; and slice 2 cups green onion. Combine all with chicken. Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, and 1 teaspoon lemon juice. Cover both mixtures and refrigerate several hours to blend flavors. At serving time, lightly toss mixtures together. Split 4 croissants in half horizontally. Spoon an equal amount of the mixture into each croissant.

BARBECUED CHICKEN SLOPPY JOES: Shred the meat of 1 roasted chicken. Dice 1 medium onion and 1 large green bell pepper. Sauté the onion and pepper in 2 tablespoons margarine until soft, about 5 minutes. Stir in chicken and 1 cup prepared barbecue sauce. Bring mixture to a boil, stirring frequently. Toast 4 hamburger buns. Spoon mixture over buns and sprinkle with ½ cup grated cheddar cheese. Place under the broiler until cheese melts.

CHICKEN TOSTADAS: Dice the meat of 1 roast chicken. Heat one 16-ounce can refried beans until hot. Heat chicken and 1 cup prepared salsa until hot. On each of 8 tostada shells, spread one-eighth of the refried beans and the chicken mixture. Garnish with shredded lettuce and cheese, chopped tomatoes, black olives, avocado, and sour cream.

CURRIED CHICKEN: Dice the meat of 1 roast chicken. Dice 1 small onion and 1 unpeeled red apple. Combine with ¼ cup raisins and 2 teaspoons curry powder and sauté in 2 tablespoons margarine, about 5 minutes. Stir in 2 tablespoons flour and ½ teaspoon salt and cook 1 minute. Gradually stir in ¾ cup milk. Cook, stirring constantly, until the sauce is thickened, about 5 minutes. Stir in chicken and heat through. Serve over cooked white or brown rice. ¾ cup yogurt may be used instead of milk, but it will not be as thick.

Start with Hamburger



One of the quickest of meals is a thick, juicy hamburger. The basic hamburger can be expanded – the possibilities are endless. Use 1¼ to 1½ pounds to serve four. And you don't have to use the traditional bun. Pita bread pockets, tortillas, kaiser rolls, or toasted Italian bread add variety.

Use a thermometer to cook hamburger to 165 F to kill bacteria that may be present.

BLUE CHEESE STUFFED BURGER: Combine one-half of a 3-ounce package cream cheese, 1 tablespoon crumbled blue cheese, 1 tablespoon minced onion, and 1 teaspoon of prepared horseradish. Form lean ground beef into eight 4-inch-diameter patties. Place 1 tablespoon of cheese mixture in the center of 4 patties and top with the remaining patties. Press edges together securely to seal. Cook until done.

SOUTHWESTERN BURGER: Add 1 teaspoon chili powder to lean ground beef. Shape the mixture into four patties. Cook until done. Top each patty with shredded lettuce, grated cheddar cheese, sliced black olives, and a spoonful of prepared salsa.

ITALIAN BURGER: Shape lean ground beef into four patties. Cook until almost done. Top each burger with one of 4 slices of provolone cheese. Continue cooking until the cheese melts and the burgers are done. Top each burger with rings of red onion, green pepper and 1 tablespoon heated pizza sauce.

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