

# HEALTHY ON THE JOB

## Keys to Effective Family Meals



- **FREQUENCY MATTERS:** While there is no “magic number” of meals per week that will guarantee benefits, research does seem to indicate that people who participated in family meals less than 3 times per week did not enjoy the benefits as much as those who participated 3 or more times per week.
- **KEEP IT SIMPLE:** making meals overly fancy, time-consuming, or complicated can actually add stress to those planning the meal. Healthy meals do not have to be difficult. Salads, soups, sandwiches can all be made quickly and easily and can be a nutritious and enjoyable meal for all. ALSO – don’t spend too much time at the table. 15-20 minutes is enough. Longer than that and younger family members will get squirmy anyway! ALSO – not too many rules, instead model good behavior.
- **PLAN AHEAD:** Even having 3 meal ideas per week can reduce the stress of making it happen. Don’t be afraid of repeating! In fact, predictability helps kids to feel safe and can help them look forward to certain meals and can even help to establish family traditions. You could also reduce cooking to a few times per week and make something that you can have for leftovers the remainder of the week.
- **SAME MEAL FOR EVERYONE:** Ideally everyone eats the same meal. This allows adults to model good behavior and sets the expectation that kids eat the same foods. This can help to reduce stress on person/people preparing the meal, too, so they don’t prepare different meals for different people. ALSO - let kids serve themselves. Start out with a little and let them know they can always take more if they are still hungry (reduces waste, discourages overeating)
- **EVERYONE HELPS:** Even young kids can help by bringing spoons or napkins to the table, or taking their plate back to the kitchen. This encourages responsibility and togetherness.
- **TURN OFF ELECTRONICS:** Keep the focus on each other. Limit distractions that can take away from enjoying each other’s company.
- **USE CONVERSATION STARTERS:** Lots of resources for these-try Harvard’s Family Dinner Project, which has a new one every day.

## MINDFULNESS SERIES

### USEFUL RESOURCES



Rutgers Cooperative Extension  
[njaes.rutgers.edu](http://njaes.rutgers.edu)



Get Moving - Get Healthy NJ  
[gmghnj.rutgers.edu](http://gmghnj.rutgers.edu)



Get Moving - Get Healthy NJ Workforce  
[gmghnj.rutgers.edu/workforce](http://gmghnj.rutgers.edu/workforce)



Family & Community Health Sciences Department  
[njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs](http://njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs)



## Addressing challenges to having family meals:

- **GETTING STARTED:** if family mealtimes have not been the norm for you or other family members, it may be a heavy lift just to get them on board in the first place. It may take TIME to establish a new routine. If possible, get family involved in planning so they get invested from the start. Start small – you don't have to have 7 or even 3 meals together at first. Begin with a goal of once or twice per week and work your way from there.
- **PLANNING:** Try planning out 1-2 meals per week. Planning more than that may seem overwhelming, especially at first. Like any skill, meal planning takes time and practice to master. Remember to keep it simple: try starting with 1 breakfast and/or 1 lunch per week.
- **DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENT TASTES:** get picky eaters involved in planning. Introduce new foods in a non-threatening way; allowing kids to express dislike in a POLITE way (don't yuck my yum!). Model good behavior. Keep introducing new foods; research shows that it takes 10 exposures to a food for kids to incorporate it into their idea of normal.
- **LACK OF COOKING SKILLS:** Keep it simple. Sandwiches and carrot sticks can be a nutritious, easy meal. Breakfast for dinner is also a fun way to do dinner with kids.

## Healthy Recipe



### Instant-Pot Macaroni & Cheese

#### Ingredients

- 1 box whole wheat elbow macaroni pasta
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 Tbs garlic salt
- 2 Tbs butter
- 2 cups low-fat shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup low fat milk (or rehydrated dry milk)



#### **\*\*Disclaimer\*\***

Always consult a qualified medical professional before changing, starting, or stopping any part of your healthcare plan, including nutrition, physical activity, or exercise. Be sure to follow all work-place safety rules, procedures and policies, and check with supervision before conducting any exercises or recommendations contained in this newsletter while at work. Rutgers Cooperative Extension does not assume any liability for injuries or health concerns arising from participation in activities mentioned or outlined in this newsletter.

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#### Instructions

- Add pasta, chicken broth and garlic salt to instant pot
- Set on high pressure for 6 minutes (per machine instructions)
- When done, carefully allow the steam / pressure out
- Open lid, stir pasta (it may still be a little watery)
- Add in butter so it melts with the hot pasta
- Then add in cheese, stir while it melts and starts to come together
- If you feel it needs more liquid, add a little milk until you like the consistency  
(often I don't even add milk because it doesn't need it)
- Add salt / pepper to taste – serve and enjoy!



## More Resources....

[choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov)

[njaes.rutgers.edu/health](http://njaes.rutgers.edu/health)

[getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu](http://getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu)

Family & Community Health Sciences  
Healthy Recipes

[vimeo.com/getmovinggethealthynj/videos](http://vimeo.com/getmovinggethealthynj/videos)

Explore our healthy recipe videos!

[EatingWell.com](http://EatingWell.com) has lots of healthy recipes.

Mayo Clinic Healthy Recipes  
[mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes](http://mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/recipes)

## Meal Planning Resources

[Healthy Eating on the Go for Families](#)

[Cooking Matters](#)

[Recipes and Cooking for Kids](#)



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**FCHS... Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities**

**FCHS**  
Family & Community Health Sciences

**Cook Homemade Meals for Your Family**

"Food has an effect on all five of our senses. We nurture others with food. When you cook a delicious meal for your family, they have something enjoyable to look forward to. They have something pleasurable to participate in once the meal is complete. **When you cook meals for your family, you are demonstrating your care and love for them.**"

Grandma Jeddah

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