FN1532 (Reviewed Nov. 2026)

Family Meal Times

Issue 7

Basic Cooking Skills Help Keep Family Meals on the Table

At the Family Table

Basic cooking skills are a must when cooking for yourself or others, especially family members. These skills provide a foundation for all family meals. Research shows that families with cooking skills are more likely to make healthier food choices and spend less money every month on food.

Cooking Basics

Three simple cooking basics will help put tasty, healthful meals on the table easily.

- **Plan meals.** Taking the time to plan simple meals for the week saves time, money and frustration.
  - Try planning meals weekly using a basic template (which you can adapt for your family) with ideas such as these:
    * Pasta Monday
    * Slow-Cooker Tuesday
    * Leftovers Wednesday
    * Casserole Thursday
    * Make-your-own Pizza Friday
  - Create a binder to store your weekly meal plans and recipes. After you've created a few meal plans, start over at week one.
- **Find family-friendly recipes.** After you find several recipes your family likes, cooking becomes easier. Keep ingredients for these recipes in the pantry for when you may need to make quick adjustments to meal plans, such as a change in schedule or someone voices a preference for a "favorite" recipe.
  - Don't have many recipes on hand? Or are you short on time? Check out the "Now You're Cookin'" publications in the Food Preparation section at www.ag.ndsu.edu/food.
- **Shop with a grocery list.** Some people do not enjoy grocery shopping. To make it less of a chore, always use a list based on the week's menu plan.
  - Check your pantry, refrigerator and freezer before shopping; you might be surprised at what you find.
  - Read sale ads to see the "specials of the week." Perhaps tortillas and chicken are on sale. Consider making chicken enchiladas for dinner this week.
  - Consider how you might supplement your meal plan with items from your own or a friend's garden, or make a trip to a local farmers market.



A Memory of Family Meals

"When I first got married, I had no cooking skills! Slowly, I created a small list of recipes my husband liked. Now, dinner is a snap!"

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Food and Family Q&A

Question: ***I use a lot of packaged foods such as rice or pasta mixes when serving my family dinner. I've heard they're often high in sodium. What could I use in place of these packaged side dishes that still have flavor and are not time-consuming to prepare?***

You're right. Packaged side mixes often are high in sodium and sometimes high in fat, too. Although they are OK to use occasionally, choosing other options will be better for your family's health. Try these homemade side dishes:

- **Veggies of all colors:** Veggies are a quick side-dish addition to any table. Try them raw, steamed, stir-fried, grilled or roasted. Add a salad to your menu in addition to a vegetable. A variety of greens mixed together with a bit of dressing is a delicious and colorful side to any meal.
- **Pasta:** Saute cooked pasta with just a splash of oil and garlic as a tasty side dish that any member of the family would enjoy. Try adding a teaspoon of Parmesan cheese for extra flavor.
- **Rice:** Try brown rice for a nutty flavor. Cooking rice in reduced-sodium chicken broth or tomato juice instead of water enhances flavor. Or mix it with salsa for a great Tex-Mex flavor.

A Family Meal Recipe

Broccoli Chicken Stir-fry

1 pound chicken breast, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 tsp. minced garlic
2 large carrots, chopped
½ tsp. powdered ginger
2 c. frozen or fresh broccoli
½ c. chicken broth
2 tsp. chicken bouillon granules (optional)
1 Tbsp. soy sauce (reduced-sodium, if available)

Cook chicken in a skillet with chicken broth. When chicken is cooked through, add the carrots, soy sauce and garlic and stir together thoroughly while adding ginger. If desired, add bouillon granules (optional – this increases sodium content). Cover and allow the vegetables to cook, stirring occasionally until the carrots begin to fry. Add broccoli and cook just a few minutes, stirring continuously. Serve immediately.

Makes four servings.

Each serving has 170 calories, 3 grams (g) fat, 25 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 290 milligrams sodium.

Menu Idea: Broccoli Chicken Stir-fry over brown rice, mandarin oranges and low-fat milk

Quick Tip: Having chicken again tomorrow night? Cook an extra chicken breast or two tonight to save on cooking time tomorrow.

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Eat Smart. Play Hard. Together

For more information about food and families, visit this NDSU Extension website: **www.ag.ndsu.edu/food**

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North Dakota State University is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Requests for accommodations related to disability may be made at 701-231-1865.
Revised August 2016; web-12-21; web-11-26