

Give Your Family a Nutrition Makeover this Spring!

Are your family members overweight? Do you wish they would make better food choices? Is it hard to get them to try new things? If you answered yes to any of these questions then it's time to give your family's meal plan a spring makeover!

To begin, put the refrigerator and the kitchen cupboards at the top of your spring cleaning list. Wash down refrigerator shelving and drawers and put in a fresh box of baking soda to absorb odors. Clean out cupboards, wipe down the shelves, and designate them to hold boxes, cans, breakfast cereals, pastas, etc. The neater and more organized the space, the easier it will be to prepare healthy meals. Next, sort through all of that food! Toss out anything that is expired. Discard produce that is starting to wilt or turn brown. Wipe down bottles of sauces, salad dressings, and condiments. Throw away leftovers that will never be eaten and pour those sugary sodas down the drain. Get rid of stale cereal and chips. You'll be amazed at what you find when you take the time to sort through it all! One last suggestion here, get rid of the junk foods that you know shouldn't be in the house. If you're one of those families who lack in self control when it comes to candies, cookies, crackers and breads, get it out and keep it out.

With all of this new space you've created, it's time to go shopping. Plan nutritious meals and snacks for the next week and write out a list of necessary ingredients. Get your children involved by letting them choose items they want to try. Buy fruits and veggies for the upcoming week, wash and cut them up as soon as you get home so they are ready-to-eat. Put fruits like apples, oranges, and bananas in a bowl on the table or counter where they will be easily accessible. Fill up the fridge with low fat beverages and snacks such as flavored water, skim milk, yogurt, and string cheese. Choose lean meats like chicken, turkey and fish over fatty ones like bacon and sausage. Stock the cupboards with high fiber cereals, dried fruits, nuts, baked chips and pretzels, popcorn, and whole grain breads and pastas.

When it's time to cook, invite your family members into the kitchen to help. The more involved they are in creating the meal, the more likely they are to try new foods. There are many fun ways to enjoy and encourage healthy eating. Let the kids plan a theme night that involves trying a new cuisine such as Mexican, Indian, or Chinese. Look for ethnic recipes online or find cookbooks at the library. Most grocery stores have aisles and aisles of these specialty foods. Or try a family style pizza party. Just grab some whole wheat pizza dough, add crushed tomatoes, some part skim mozzarella, and fresh veggies. Little ones can get involved by washing produce and gathering ingredients. Let the older children help with spreading the tomatoes on the crust and sprinkling the cheese. Teens can do the cutting, slicing, and chopping. Throw the pizzas in the oven and bake according to the package directions and you've got a healthy pizza in less time than it takes to have one delivered.

Getting kids to try new foods is often a struggle. Employ the rule that everyone must try one bite of a new food. Encourage them to try new foods at school too. Over time, the fear of new things will subside and your family will have a long list of favorite foods to choose from. By gradually replacing less nutritious foods with healthier items, you can instill lifelong habits and make a difference in your family's nutritional health.

Happy Spring!

