

K-State Extension Connection

Healthy Eating in a Hurry

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Whether we formally call them “resolutions” or not, many of us are beginning the New Year with good intentions of cooking more meals at home because we know it benefits our health as well as our pocketbook. However, as we get past the holidays and back into our normal hurried lives, we find ourselves lacking the time needed to prepare even one healthy meal. If this dilemma sounds all too familiar to you, be encouraged. There are some things we can do to maximize the food prep time we have available and accomplish our healthy eating goals even when time is in short supply! Consider these tips:

Save Time By Planning Ahead.

***Make a List.** Set aside time each week to plan a menu. Write down what you plan to eat and what ingredients you need for each meal for the week ahead.

***Shop Smart.** Save time by grocery shopping only one time each week. Avoid lines by shopping during slower hours at the grocery store such as early mornings or late nights. Stay clear of weekday evenings around dinner time and weekend afternoons when stores are busiest.

Consider Convenience.

***Save time by purchasing ready-to-eat produce** such as baby carrots, pre-washed salad mixes, pre-cut broccoli and cauliflower florets, shredded carrots or cabbage, baby spinach, cherry or grape tomatoes, and frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.

Try Healthy Time-Saving Proteins and Grains.

***Rotisserie chicken, pre-cooked chicken or beef strips, frozen turkey meatballs, frozen shrimp or individually packaged un-breaded fish fillets** can all be great time-savers.

***Try canned low-sodium beans, canned tuna (in water), par-boiled brown rice or microwavable rice packets.**

***Experiment with bulgur, whole wheat couscous; or frozen pre-cooked rice, grains, or steel cut oats.**

Spend Less Time Cooking.

***Cook in large batches and freeze for later.** It saves time and money to cook a recipe once and eat it multiple times. Soups, stews, casseroles, enchiladas, and lasagna are excellent options.

***Use leftovers in creative ways.** When you have food leftover from one meal, reinvent it into something new. Some ideas include:

- Leftover chicken or turkey can be used in soup, quesadillas, or chicken pot pie.
- Leftover steak can make fajitas, beef stroganoff, stew, or Cobb salad.
- Leftover veggies are great in an omelet or quiche, stir-fry, or burritos.
- Leftover fruit is perfect for smoothies.

***Seek out “One Pot” meals.** One pot or skillet dishes save on both preparation and clean up time by preparing the entire meal in one dish. They are easy to make and usually freeze and reheat well. Search online for recipe inspiration and ideas.

Use Time-Saving Small Kitchen Appliances.

***A slow cooker** is a great way to have a meal waiting for you when you get home from work or school. Use a slow cooker to make soups, stews, baked pasta dishes, roasts, or even oatmeal.

***A food processor** makes preparing vegetables for cooking quick and easy.

***The microwave** makes it quicker and easier to cook foods than in the oven or stovetop. In addition to reheating leftovers, use the microwave to: make scrambled eggs, quickly bake potatoes or sweet potatoes, or steam vegetables.

A hurried lifestyle doesn't have to rob you of the great home-cooked meals you and your family need to stay healthy and save money. Try some of these tips to help your family dine healthfully even when you are crunched for time!

For more information, contact the Wildcat Extension District, Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at [facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district](https://www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district).

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Slow Cooker Taco Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. lean or extra-lean ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 (16-oz.) can chili beans, with liquid
- 1 (15-oz.) can kidney beans, with liquid
- 1 (15-oz.) can whole-kernel corn, with liquid
- 1 (8-oz.) can tomato sauce (low-sodium)
- 2 c. water
- 2 (14.5-oz.) cans peeled and diced tomatoes (low-sodium)
- 1 (4-oz.) can diced green chili peppers
- 1 pkg. taco seasoning mix (low-sodium)



Directions:

In a medium skillet, cook the ground beef until browned over medium heat. Drain. Place the ground beef, onion, chili beans, kidney beans, corn, tomato sauce, water, diced tomatoes, green chili peppers and taco seasoning mix in a slow cooker. Mix to blend and cook on low setting for eight hours.

Makes 10 servings. Each serving has 220 calories, 3 grams (g) fat, 30 g carbohydrate, 6 g fiber and 500 mg sodium.

Menu Idea:

Slow Cooker Taco Soup, baked tortilla chips, apple slices, low-fat milk

Source: North Dakota State University Extension