

Easy Recipes for Better Family Meals

The daily dilemma: what to cook for dinner. After years of cooking for my family, I can honestly say that I'm losing my creative will in the dinner department. Now that I have a picky four-year-old to consider in the equation, the dilemma has increased to almost disaster size. He has a list of about 5 items that he'll eat and will not vary easily. In other words, I'm having a rather difficult time finding easy to prepare meals that will satisfy the whole family. What to do, what to do?

For most busy families, time is the enemy. They simply don't have enough time to prepare anything more than something pre-packaged from a box. I've been there, done that, and I can also say that it gets old, is unhealthy and eventually someone in the family will start to complain anyway. The question here is: Is there a way to combine healthy eating with convenience?

Why of course there is! Making better meal planning a priority does not have cause groans from the cook. There are new methods of meal preparation and easy to fix staples available these days that can make you say 'ahhh'. In fact, getting the kids involved in the kitchen has become another novel way of getting picky eaters to actually put something other than PBJs in there sweet little mouths. My own little guy found a recipe in one of the cute kid cookbooks I bought him and with his help we made dinner and he 'ate it!' Wow, I'm a believer.

So, what are some easy recipes for better family meals? Here are a couple of recipes that I've made in the past month that were hits with everyone in the family from grumpy dad to doubting daughter and picky pint-size pouter:

Pepperoni Pizza Quesadillas

8 – 10 inch flour tortillas
2 ½ cups cheddar cheese (I just buy the 10 oz pre-shredded)
1 cup salsa (I tend to go with mild since it's a meal for the whole family)
½ cup chopped green olives, drained
1 package of sliced pepperoni

Preheat oven to 400 F. Place 2 tortillas on a cookie sheet and top each with cheddar cheese. Put another tortilla on top of each cheese covered tortilla and bake for 5 minutes. Take out of oven and press down on tortillas with a spatula. Top with salsa, olives, some more cheese and pepperoni. Put back in oven and cook for 5 minutes more or until the edges are brown and crispy and the cheese is melted on top. This is great with a garden salad.

C.J.'s Little Meat Loaf

1 egg
1 lb ground beef or turkey
1 cup oatmeal
1 onion, grated (I use onion flakes to save time, tastes great)
1/3 cup ketchup
¼ cup Parmesan cheese

1 tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper
Extra ketchup for the tops

Preheat oven to 350F. Lightly spray 8 muffin cups with cooking spray. Combine ground meat, oatmeal, onion, egg, ketchup, Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper in a bowl; mix well with your hands or a spoon. Divide the meat mixture into 8 balls and put each into a muffin cup; press down lightly. Put more ketchup on the tops of each little meat loaf. Bake for 30 minutes or until no longer pink inside. Transfer to paper towel covered plate to drain and then serve with mashed potatoes, green beans and carrots...yum!

These recipes have gone over great in my house, and I bet they'll be devoured well in yours too. Making family meal preparation and family meal time a priority will encourage children to develop healthy eating habits - an important key to good health as adults. By making meal time less stressful you can focus on the joys of spending time together instead of the hassles of preparing meals. Every member of the family can enjoy dinner time again.

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