

April 2008

Dear Colleagues,

Happy spring and welcome to the fourth issue of *It's All About Balance: Eat Smart, Play Hard, Rest Well*. For April, we focus on the evening meal with tasty ways to **Slow Down and Enjoy Dinner** - and our nutrient-rich recipe-of-the-month: **Asian Beef and Vegetable Stir-fry**, reprinted by permission of www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com, funded by the Beef Checkoff. In honor of Earth Day (April 22, 2008), our fitness handout is all about how to **Enjoy a Family Garden** - a delicious way to combine nutrition with fun outdoor activity.

April is an obvious time to promote gardening - as the earth warms with spring sunshine and vegetable seedlings begin to sprout in local greenhouses. April is also *Children and Nature Awareness Month* (www.cnaturenet.org), part of the national movement "to leave no child inside." Growing fresh produce - in containers, in a backyard plot, or as part of a community garden - is a positive and practical way to connect children to the outdoors.

April is also an important time to focus on slowing down to enjoy dinner time. As spring baseball and soccer seasons kick into high gear, it is easy for families to fall into fast food or microwave habits. While these routines can skimp on nutrition and family togetherness, our tips offer easy ways for both quick-to-fix meals and enjoying each other around the table. Just a little bit of planning can make a big difference in both health and happiness!

This month we want to say a special thanks to **Hilary Graham LaFoley**, dietetic intern from Bozeman, who ably assisted several Montana nutrition projects this past year, including excellent work on the recipes for these packets. She was instrumental in choosing recipes and getting permission to use them, as well as in adding substitutions and suggestions. We want to compliment **Hilary** on her delicious choices - and wish her all the best in her career.

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions about our **Healthy Families 2008** packets. Although we have a general outline for each packet (and twelve pretested recipes), we are eager to incorporate your input whenever possible. Just send your thoughts along to me at EatRightMT2000@gmail.com - and remember: Past issues of **Healthy Families** and other ERM materials are available at www.eatrightmontana.org/

Dayle Hayes, MS, RD

Healthy Families packets are made possible with generous support from agencies, organizations, and individuals. Please join us in thanking the 2007 sponsors listed on the right. If you use this packet and can make a donation to support positive, practical messages for families, please contact ERM Chair Katie Bark at 406-994-5641 or kbark@mt.gov

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It's All About Balance | Celebrating Healthy Families 2008

4 Fun Ways to Enjoy a Family Garden

The refrain from an old John Denver song suggests that there's "only two things that money can't buy and that's true love and homegrown tomatoes." Although you may find homegrown tomatoes in your farmer's markets this summer, you can't ever buy the pride and joy of picking and eating a tomato grown in your own garden! Family gardens bring many other pleasures to both adults and children - such as working together in the sun and maybe the rain; digging in the dirt with wiggly worms; watching things grow and change; and, most of all, learning to eat the freshest produce on the planet. Gardening is the best possible combination of nutrition and physical activity.

Start small - perhaps with a salad bowl garden.

If you have been gardening for years, you probably know how much work you can reasonably take on. If you've never been much of a gardener, start small - in containers or a few square feet in the yard. Concentrate easy-to-grow items for salads: a variety of leaf lettuces, some radishes, a cherry tomato plant or two, and a few fragrant herbs (such as parley and basil). Window boxes and other containers (clean bleach or milk bottles with tops cut off) work especially well for kids.

Choose child-sized tools, plants, and produce.

Children do best with things that fit well into their hands - and their mouths. Get child-sized hoes, rakes, and shovels at a nursery or garden center. Try to find strong, genuine looking tools so that little ones feel like "real" gardeners. Can't afford new tools this summer? Large recycled plastic spoons from the kitchen work great in containers. Look for specific miniature or baby vegetables plants - such as corn, radishes, tomatoes, and zucchini - just the right-size for small eaters!

Be prepared for less-than-perfect plantings.

Let's face it: gardening can be messy business. And most children love to dig in dirt, so save a small area for digging, even after planting is complete. It's important for children to feel like the garden is really theirs - so be willing to put up with crooked rows and mixed plantings. Children can also get attached to "their" weeds and want to care for them right along with the veggies and fruits. Bottom line: It doesn't have to look perfect to produce perfectly delicious produce!

Make gardening an outdoor adventure.

The most important aspect of family gardening is spending active time together - away from TVs, DVDs, video games, computers, and cell phones. Have reasonable expectations about what children will do in the garden and about how much produce you may actually get (you can always find a farmer's market if you need to). Take time to smell the herbs, roll in the grass, run in the sprinkler, and leave the garden behind for a long walk around the neighborhood.

NEED SOME BASIC OR ADVANCED GARDENING TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS? Good gardening advice is as close as your local library, bookstore, or computer. Check the children's bookshelves for age-appropriate guides like *Ready, Set, Grow! A Kid's Guide to Gardening* (by Rebecca Spohn) or *Kids Garden!* (by Avery Hart and Paul Mantell). For Montana specific tips, call your county Extension agent or visit the MSU Extension site for MontGuides on every gardening topic imaginable: <http://extn.msu.montana.edu/Publications/ESCatalog/YARDPublicCatalogYARDlist.asp?cmd=reset>



4 Tasty Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy Dinner

A relaxed family dinner offers real benefits for adults and children. First, there is the weight advantage. Several studies in different countries have confirmed that leisurely eating leads to feeling fuller with less food. Adults who eat more slowly tend to consume fewer calories at mealtime and to have lower weights. Then, there is the positive effect that family mealtimes can have on children. When families eat five or more meals together per week, young people tend to have healthier weights, more success in school, fewer eating problems, lower substance abuse rates, and less depression. Want to give your family all these advantages? Here are four ways to make mealtimes matter.

Give your family meals the time and attention they deserve.

It takes approximately 20 minutes from the time you start eating for your brain to send out signals of fullness. Give your family the gift of leisurely eating by allowing at least 25 to 30 minutes for an evening meal wherever you eat. Whether you are eating around your kitchen table, dining at a nice restaurant, or having a picnic at the ballpark, allowing plenty of time to enjoy the meal will give everyone the chance to refuel and recharge in the midst of a hectic schedule.

Get the whole family involved in dinner - from start to finish.

The evening meal doesn't have to be one person's responsibility. Even very young children like being involved in planning and preparing healthful meals. Some family mealtime benefits may actually develop when children understand that they play an important role in the process. Assign age-appropriate jobs, like choosing the fruit for dessert, mixing pre-cut vegetables into a salad, setting the table with unbreakable dishes/glasses, or clearing the dishes afterwards.

Create a pleasant, distraction-free zone at the dinner table.

Of all the things that can quickly improve mealtime atmosphere, this is undoubtedly the most important. Ask the whole family to turn off their electronic gizmos (TV, DVD, PDA, computer, radio, MP3 player, and non-emergency cell phones) for just 30 minutes. Background music is fine - at a low volume. The goal is to provide a relatively quiet time to enjoy food and being together. A low stress mealtime environment helps to control overeating and to improve digestion after eating.

Make family conversations the centerpiece of your time together.

Pleasant conversations make good meals even better. They help young children expand their vocabulary and other language skills. They help adults learn what is really going on in the lives of young people. They help everyone feel more secure and connected in a confusing and often overwhelming world. For new ideas on what to talk about at the table, download ERM's free April 2007 conversations card at: www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm

Need some help with planning healthy menus? Visit USDA's totally new, totally free MyPyramid menu planning tool at www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner/. Using your age, gender, weight, height, and level of physical activity, the planner assesses how balanced your current eating habits are - and offers small changes to help tip the scales in a healthier direction. **MyPyramid Menu Planner** is designed for busy people who want to track both their calorie intake and the quality of their food choices - and then make realistic improvements rather than resorting to extreme diets.



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MT Department of Public Health & Human Services

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Balanced Evening Meals for Happy, Healthy Families

April can be tough on family dinner time. In addition to usual hectic schedules, baseball and spring soccer seasons kick into high gear - adding practices and games on top of everything else. When time is tight, it's easy to slip into the fast food lane or microwave habit - with everyone eating at different times and places. While the drive-thru can take a toll on both nutrition and family togetherness, the experts have some easy tips on getting balance back into your busy evenings.

"There are several very simple steps that can help families manage their evenings," says Tara Andrews, MSU Extension agent in Custer County and mother of two daughters. "It all starts with just a little planning and mealtime organization. Then, you have to get the whole family involved in preparing and serving the meal. When everybody pitches in, no one feels overwhelmed. Actually, everyone feels much better when they are enjoying delicious, nutritious meals together."

Andrews definitely qualifies as an expert in mealtime management. As an Extension agent in Custer County, she currently oversees two popular programs to help families eat better and manage their food budgets more effectively. The quarterly *Quick2Fix* newsletter, distributed to Custer residents and Extension staff in Montana, features recipes and tips designed to make delicious dinners and pleasant mealtimes a reality for busy families. Thirty openings in the most recent *Kid's Chef School*, for 2nd and 3rd graders, filled up literally overnight after the flyer was sent home to Miles City families.

According to Andrews, the basics of quick-to-fix meals aren't complicated or difficult. "In fact, the best ideas are really the old standards, used by smart families for decades. Here are my favorite three tips. If these sound like things you've heard a hundred times before, they probably are - because these are the strategies that really work!"

- **Have a week's worth of menus in mind:** Whether you write them down or keep them in your head, families need 5 to 7 tried-and-true main dishes that are easy and popular with everyone. Once you have an entree - such as tacos, spaghetti, oven baked chicken, or crockpot stew - all you need to add is a vegetable and fruit to complete the meal.
- **Keep your kitchen stocked with quick-to-fix foods:** Whenever you shop, look for specials on frozen and canned fruits (in juice) and veggies. With a wide variety of tasty choices on hand, you'll only have to worry about the main entree when it's time to make dinner. Add fresh produce items when the price is right, as with the weekly features in store ads.
- **Prepare multiple batches of main ingredients:** If you're cooking ground beef, it's just as easy to cook a double or triple batch. Freeze extra family-size servings - ready-to-reheat for tacos or casseroles. For stir-fry dishes, slice and freeze extra beef, pork, or chicken - and veggies, so they're ready to drop into a wok or skillet for quick cooking on a busy night.

"Getting children involved in meals helps get dinner on the table quickly," notes Ms. Andrews. "Our experiences with the *Kid's Chef School* prove that children love to participate in meal preparation and that parents love to have a extra pair of hands to help with age-appropriate tasks." Need a new salad idea? The number one favorite dish of young Custer County chefs is a simple Waldorf salad: Chop a couple of crisp apples and mix with raisins and vanilla yogurt to taste.

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm



Asian Beef and Vegetable Stir-Fry

Ingredients:

- 1¼ pound boneless beef top sirloin, cut 1 inch thick
- 4 cups assorted fresh vegetables, such as sugar snap peas, broccoli florets, bell pepper strips, and shredded carrots
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ cup prepared stir-fry sauce, preferably sesame ginger flavor
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper (or to taste)
- 3 cups hot cooked rice
- 2 Tablespoons unsalted dry-roasted peanuts (optional)

Instructions:

- 1) Cut beef steak lengthwise in half, then crosswise into ¼ inch thick strips.
- 2) Combine vegetables and 3 Tablespoons water in large nonstick skillet. Cover and cook over medium-high heat for 4 minutes or until crisp-tender. Remove and drain.
- 3) Heat same pan over medium-high heat until hot. Add ½ of beef and ½ of garlic; stir-fry 1 to 2 minutes or until outside surface of beef is no longer pink. Remove. Repeat with remaining beef and garlic.
- 4) Return all beef and vegetables to pan. Add stir-fry sauce and red pepper; heat through. Spoon over rice and serve. Sprinkle with peanuts, if desired.

Yield: 4 servings

Ideas/Substitutions

- Substitute brown rice for white rice, as desired.
- Use any stir-fry sauce you enjoy.
- Try stir-frying the vegetables and beef in low-sodium soy sauce instead of a stir-fry sauce.
- Pre-packaged bags of frozen stir-fry vegetables can be used.
- Involve the kids! Let them choose the vegetables and lend a hand in washing/peeling them (or chopping if age appropriate).

Nutrition Analysis

Serving Size: ¼ of recipe

Calories: 404

Total Fat: 7.0 g

Saturated Fat: 2.0 g

Monounsaturated Fat: 3.0 g

Total Carb: 45 g

Dietary Fiber: 3.6 g

Sodium: 321 mg

Protein: 38 g

Iron: 4.2 mg

Recipe Source

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www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com