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HOW DO THE HEALTH EXPERTS GET THEIR FAMILIES TO EAT HEALTHY MEALS AT HOME?

7 EASY TIPS

Here's the burning question – how do you get kids to eat healthy? The latest food guidance systems – the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid - tell us the food groups to eat and how much, but how do you translate this information into healthy recipes that parent's will prepare and kids will eat? Registered dietitian and cookbook author, Susan Patton went right to the health experts.

Patton sent a recipe request to over 1000 health professionals involved with their state's comprehensive school health programs for nutritious recipes that their families and/or students like. The requirement was that the recipes fit within the recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines – contain whole grains, are low in sugar, promote colored vegetables -especially dark green and orange - and are low in fat and trans fat free. “If you are going to take the time to create family meals, you want meals that taste good and are appealing – recipes that are kid tested and family approved.” Patton received over 300 recipes from health professionals all over the United States along with tips they use to create healthy meals.

Patton also interviewed families that eat 5 meals or more together a week. Five family meals a week seems to be the magic key to help keep kids off drugs and help them get better grades. Teens who sit down to dinner with their family are 70% less likely to have a substance abuse problem, are one third less likely to try alcohol, and are 50% less likely to smoke (Columbia University, 2003). They also eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy products (Journal of Adolescent Health, 2003). Adolescents in families that have structured family meals also develop less disordered eating habits (Journal of Adolescent Health, 2004).

Patton used these tips from the experts and families to create *Cooking With MyPyramid*, family cookbook. Here are 7 tips from the cookbook to help your family prepare healthy meals:

1. Be a meal planner and make 5 new recipes a week. The recipes can be for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacks. Patton included a *MyPyramid 25 Stars Challenge* with each recipe to encourage the cook in the house to prepare the recipe with the nutritious ingredients. When 25 stars are colored, the family receives a reward that they set.

2. Make it a goal to try 1 new food a week – broccolini, winter squash, a new whole grain or a new bean. Look for stores that offer grains and beans in bulk, and purchase a small amount to try in the recipes.
3. Start out slowly when you add new ingredients. For example, if your family is not accustomed to whole-wheat noodles, start with $\frac{3}{4}$ white enriched noodles combined with $\frac{1}{4}$ whole-wheat noodles. Gradually increase the whole-wheat portion over time.
4. Serve stronger flavored vegetables such as cauliflower and broccoli, tender-crisp. The flavors are not as developed when undercooked. Tender-crisp vegetables are brighter in color, have more crunch, and are overall more appealing to kids and adults!
5. Try new vegetables at the beginning of the meal when everyone is the hungriest. Serve a small portion size, maybe just 2 Tbsp to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup. Everyone can always ask for seconds. Remember that it may take 12 tastes before a new food is accepted – and this applies to kids and adults.
6. If you like the individually packaged snacks, make sure they are healthy. Use nutrition guidelines to select healthy snacks at the grocery store. Give your children the guidelines and let them pick out the snacks to pack in their lunch. Guidelines should include 35% or less of calories from fat, 10% or less of calories from saturated fat, and 35% or less of weight from sugar. Patton made it easy for shoppers to find those healthy snacks and created a *Healthy Snack Wheel* that accompanies *Cooking With MyPyramid* to use at the grocery store.
7. Reward your family and yourself for trying new recipes and new foods, as well as increasing activity with non-food ideas. Some of the ideas in *Cooking With MyPyramid* include a visit to a zoo, museum, indoor water park, or other movement activities.

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If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Susan A. Patton, please call Susan Patton at 614-204-1663 or email Susan at kidfitconnections.com.

Cooking With MyPyramid comes with a *Healthy Snack Turn* to select nutritious snacks as well as a *Your Pyramid Connections* slide guide to help your family determine their calorie needs based on activity levels and recommended food groups amounts, both daily and weekly. The cookbook can be used as a healthy school fundraiser. More information and ordering information can be found at CookingWithMyPyramid.com.