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Trash the takeout

Are you cooking at home? You should be – it's healthier, not to mention cheaper. And easier than you think.

Jen Weigel

Lessons for life

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Do you cook at home? Think it takes too much time? I asked several women at one of my book talks recently if they ever cook dinner.

"No way," said Lisa Jefferson of Andersonville. "I get everything to go."

"I wish," said Juliette Samuelson from South Bend, Ind. "If I cook once a month, it's a miracle."

"What do you eat?" I asked her. "Takeout," she said. "The most I cook for my kids is mac and cheese."

I then asked the group of about 150 people to raise their hands if they cooked at home. Only three people responded "yes".

So why are so many people opting for drive-through convenience rather than homemade nutrients? Most feel it's just too much work.

"Cooking doesn't have to be complicated or time consuming," says Kathryn Guylay of Winnetka. As a mother of two and a self-taught home cook with a passion for nutrition, Guylay knows what she's talking about. She decided to extend her knowledge of healthy eating by starting two programs over the past two years: the Healthy Kids Ideas Exchange website (<http://www.healthykidsideasexchange.com>), which is a resource for families to swap recipes and tips to stay healthy; and Nurture Your Family (<http://www.nurtureyourfamily.org>), where qualified caregivers are given hands-on instruction on how to cook nutritious and easy meals at home.

And there are some compelling reasons to do so.

"One in three American children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes if they adopt the nation's inactive and overeating lifestyle," says Guylay. "We have to do something about this before it's too late."

Guylay developed recipes based on a simple framework that includes proteins, seasonings and whole

advertisement

The advertisement is a rectangular graphic with a teal background. At the top, it reads "FLU SHOTS & HEALTHY FOODS" in white, followed by "THE PERFECT MATCH FOR COLD & FLU SEASON" in smaller white text. Below this, there are two rows of four boxes each. The top row has one box on the left with an orange bandage icon and the text "A FLU SHOT TO LAST THE WHOLE SEASON", and three boxes on the right with the text "FLU SHOTS WHERE YOU SHOP". The bottom row has three boxes on the left with "FLU SHOTS WHERE YOU SHOP", one box on the right with the orange bandage icon and "A FLU SHOT TO LAST THE WHOLE SEASON", and one box on the far right with "FLU SHOTS WHERE YOU SHOP". At the bottom of the teal section, it says "IN-STORE FLU SHOTS JUST \$26.99" in white. Below the teal section is an orange banner with the text "ROLLOVER TO PLAY | FIND YOUR FLU SHOT" in white, and the "Jewel-Osco Pharmacy" logo on the right.

grains. Most of the meals take less than five minutes to prepare, and have fewer than seven ingredients.

Ease of preparation is just one of the many reasons you might want to start cooking at home.

"Did you know that buying processed, packaged foods in the store is significantly more expensive than buying ingredients for things you put together yourself?" says Guylay. "On two virtual shopping trips for Healthy Kids Ideas Exchange, we learned that \$100 buys 40 percent more meals when purchasing the ingredients as opposed to buying premade (canned and boxed) meals."

And you don't have to worry about getting the latest kitchen upgrades to make these meals.

"Most of our recipes are made with slow cookers or rice cookers, and nothing else. These help flavors blend together by steadily incorporating heat all day, and you only need a few minutes of preparation." explains Guylay. "All they had to do was put in the ingredients when they leave the house, and by the time they get home, they've been simmering all day. The hardest part is done."

Another added bonus with cooking at home is that extra pep in your step.

"Seventy percent of families who participated in our programs say they noticed an increase in energy after following the menus," says Guylay.

Here are 5 tips to getting on a healthy cooking routine with your family.

Involve your children in making meals. From shopping at the store, to putting it together at meal time, "they love to feel like they being helpful," says Guylay.

Buy a rice or slow cooker and keep it simple. "Great taste doesn't mean dozens of ingredients. Forget the recipe books and cut yourself a break."

Be creative when describing foods to kids. "X-ray vision carrots" or "big and strong salmon" are more likely to be eaten than boring old carrots or salmon, Guylay says.

Don't force food on anyone. "We give praise to our kids for starting with just smelling a new food," says Guylay. "Many foods need to be introduced multiple times in order for kids to be willing to try it and like it."

It's OK to stray. "Don't punish yourself for the occasional pizza place," says Guylay. "It's all about baby steps, work-in-progress. Have fun."

If you start kids on nutritious foods early enough, it can become a habit for life.

"One of the most rewarding things that I saw during our classes was when the kids came back for seconds and thirds," says Guylay. "They were self professed 'picky eaters' and loved the foods they were trying. Now that's progress."

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Catch Jenniffer Weigel's TribU segments Tuesdays on WGN TV Morning News, and weekdays throughout the day on CLTV.

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