

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Healthy eating for busy families

Eating healthy can be challenging and overwhelming, especially when trying to balance work, family needs, and a social life. While it might seem easier to go to the nearest drive-through or buy packaged and pre-made foods, these types of food are often filled with added sugars and trans-fats. However, there are some easy lifestyle adjustments that can make healthy meals and snacks just as easy of an option.

Pick your recipes first

Pick one day of the week or every other week, when you know you will have a few hours free to choose recipes to make, go grocery shopping, and then “meal-prep”.

Start by selecting three or four recipes that are simple and will last the week; this should take no more than 15 minutes. When choosing recipes, try and pick those that have at least two vegetables included. Pinterest and Foodgawker.com are excellent resources for finding recipes. There are thousands of different recipes available and the search function makes it easy to find options to suit all dietary needs.

Here are a few easy meal and snack ideas that can get you started:

- Slow cooker soup, stews, chili
- One pan roasted vegetables and protein (chicken or fish)
- Hard boiled eggs
- Stir-fry
- Vegetables and hummus

Once you have the recipes, it can be beneficial to write out your weekly meals using a planner.

Shop for your ingredients next

Based on the recipes chosen, make a list of groceries you will need and head to the store. Having a grocery list will ensure you only buy what you need, and prevent you from wasting time aimlessly wandering. This will save you money and time.

A good rule of thumb when grocery shopping is to shop the perimeter of the store. The perimeter is where you will find fresh fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, and eggs are located. To help speed up your meal preparation at home, you might want to opt for pre-cut fruits and vegetables. Most grocery stores have produce such as squash, sweet potatoes, parsnips, broccoli, cauliflower and melons already chopped. Some stores also carry peeled garlic, riced cauliflower, microwave ready green beans, and frozen chopped onions. Stocking your freezer with frozen fruits and vegetables can also be a time saver for those weeks when you don’t have the time to get to the grocery store.

Time to cook!

Now, you can begin preparing the foods you will need to make your recipes. Chop any fruits and vegetables that were not pre-cut, steam or roast these, and cook grains like rice or quinoa. This will speed up the cooking process when you want to make meals for your family. Consider doubling the recipe so that you will have leftovers, which can then be packed for lunch or eaten as dinner another day of the week.

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Read the ingredient list

For those times when you will not be able to meal plan for the week, make sure you read the ingredient list on pre-prepared products. You should be able to pronounce everything on the list, and have a general idea of what each ingredient is. Try and avoid added sugars and steer clear of anything with trans-fats.

Make it a family affair

Making healthy choices for you and your family requires some time and planning, but involving the whole family can make the process less daunting. Get creative with the meals, have your kids help pick the recipes and get them involved in the grocery shopping and cooking process. This way it can become a fun family activity!