

# Plan Healthy, Easy Meals

By Curt Hagedorn

Sometimes trying to plan healthier meals for yourself or your family seems like a losing battle. You might succeed for a week or so, but soon those potato chips and cookies full of salt and fat and sugar start creeping back into your diet. When you're locked in a life and death battle with chocolate sandwich cookies and corn chips, you realize just how truly addictive the vast array of snack foods available everywhere from the grocery store to the gas station have become.

Why do we eat what we know is so bad for us? Well, not to go into the reasons behind the cravings you might have given moment, there are basically two things to overcome: First, eating when you're not "hungry," when your body doesn't need the calories and other nutrients you're ingesting. Imagine if you kept pouring gasoline into your car even though the tank was full – you'd have a situation as dangerous as the one that you're creating right now around your middle. Second is portion control. You don't need to feel cheated if you don't have a pound of meat and a pound of pasta on your plate when you sit down to dinner, but you do. All that being said, here are a few tricks to help you fight the battle of the bulge and plan and serve meals that are good for you -- with just as little thought as it takes you to whip up that deep friend peanut butter, bacon and cheese sandwich that's your favorite recipe these days.

Your first line of defense is at the grocery store. What you don't have around you, you can't eat – and if your family has a problem with that and demands Twinkies, remind them that how hard it will be getting along without you after your heart attack – being healthy is SERIOUS business for everyone in your family. Now, when you're shopping remember to, first, shop primarily the edges of the store – the produce, meat and dairy departments. Why? because that's where the fresh, unprocessed food is. You can make an immediately change in what you put on the dinner table by buying food that is just like it was in the Garden of Eden – meaning not pre-cooked, refined, chemically enhanced or pumped full of added corn syrup and salt (there's a persistent rumor that the Tree of Knowledge actually bore Snickers, not apples.) If you have to, make two circuits of the grocery store – one to fill your cart and one to empty it of everything you have added that isn't on your list or contains artificial ingredients. And if you find this far too difficult, take the incremental approach. The first week you can have five foods from the center aisles of the store, the next four, the next three and so on. A few "allowed" things you may need to venture into the center aisles for include brown rice, 100% whole grain breads and pastas. And of course, unprocessed frozen vegetables, as well as canned and jarred, if they're not loaded with preservatives, can be better than fresh when fresh are out of season.

Your second line of defense is in portion control. It's great if you want to follow a diet plan – ten million of them are available at your local bookstore, and they're full of recipes and menu plans and recommended portion sizes. But if you want to jump-start yourself, here are a few tricks. Make what ever you like out of the fresh foods you've chose at the store, and dish up a normal portion. Then put half of it back. If that doesn't work, serve yourself the way the Japanese do, on small plates and saucers. Put away the big dinner plates and huge pasta bowls. In fact, eating with chopsticks might not be such a bad idea – ANYTHING that makes you think about the food you're eating. And seconds? They're a thing of the past. The result will be cutting your calorie intake in half. And if that doesn't do the trick, cut it in half again. And do buy a calorie guide or computer diet program so you know what's in what you're putting in your mouth – if you wouldn't pick something up off the street and eat it, why don't you know more about the foods you are eating and serving your family.

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