

It's easy to prepare tasty meals

What does research say about overweight kids?



FLORINE MARK

Those lazy, lazy days of summer have come to a close. Now it's back to carpoles, soccer practices, dance lessons and football practices. So how do parents find the time to squeeze in healthy meals between shuttle services?

With a little planning, parents can create low-fat, delicious dinners for those rushed evenings that are sure to be family favorites. Many families end up eating frozen dinners or fast food when schedules get hectic. That's OK once in a while but five nights a week is definitely not a good idea.

Fast and frozen foods are extremely high in sodium and are high in fat and calories as well. The fast food habit is not a good one for you or your kids to get into. If you know your family has a busy week ahead, make dinner plans now. A little planning can save time and sanity during the week.

An excellent "do-ahead" dish is Texas Chili. This recipe actually tastes better if made a day or two in advance because the flavors have a chance to blend and mellow. You can even consider doubling the recipe to freeze some for future meals when you're pressed for time.

This recipe is a bit on the spicy side, so if you prefer it milder, omit or cut down the jalapenos and use the lesser amount of chili powder or a mild blend. If it's still too hot and you need to cool off your mouth, eat yogurt or drink milk. Or serve the dish sprinkled with a mild grated

cheese or with nonfat sour cream on top.

Texas Chili

1 pound lean beef top round, cut into 1" chunks

2 onions, chopped

4 garlic cloves, minced

2-3 jalapeno peppers, seeded, deveined and minced (wear gloves to prevent irritation) or ½ cup canned chopped chilies

1-3 tablespoons hot chili powder

1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder

1 ½ teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon cinnamon

3 cups beef broth

1. In a large nonstick sauceron or Dutch oven, cook the beef, stirring constantly, until browned, about five minutes. Add the onions, garlic and jalapenos; saute until the onions are softened, about five minutes. Add the chili powder, cocoa, cumin, oregano and cinnamon; stir until the spices coat the beef and vegetables.

2. Stir in the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, partially covered, until the beef is cooked through, the broth is thickened and the flavors are blended, 1-1½ hours.

Another easy recipe that can be made ahead of time is Tuna Noodle Casserole. You can cook the pasta and vegetables the night before and refrigerate all the ingredients. When it's time to make dinner, mix up a batch of combining the ingredients and popping it in the oven!

Tuna Noodle Casserole

2 cups nonfat egg noodles

One 16-ounce bag frozen mixed vegetables, thawed

One 6-ounce can water-packed solid white tuna, drained and flaked

1½ cups skim milk

2 eggs

½ cup shredded reduced-fat extra-sharp cheddar cheese

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Spray a shallow 1½-quart casserole with nonstick cooking spray. Cook the noodles according to package directions; drain and rinse with cold water. In the casserole, combine the noodles and mixed vegetables; scatter the tuna over the top.

2. In a medium bowl, lightly beat together the milk and eggs; stir in about ½ cup of the cheese, the salt and pepper, then pour over the pasta mixture. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake until golden brown, 25-30 minutes.

If your family argues over who gets the drumsticks, Barbecued Chicken Drumsticks is the ideal recipe for you. The sweet-and-sour sauce makes these positively irresistible and there are only four grams of fat per serving!

A tip for success with the sauce is to mix the barbecue marinade with the brown sugar and taste it before you add the chicken since commercial barbecue sauces vary in sweetness. If the marinade is too tangy for your liking, add the brown sugar. If not, leave it out. If you prepare the marinade while the kids are at school or the night before, the actual cooking time on a busy night is only about 10 or 15 minutes. That's not bad for a healthy family pleaser!

Barbecued Chicken Drumsticks

½ cup ketchup

1 tablespoon cider vinegar

1 tablespoon barbecue sauce

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon firmly packed brown sugar

1½ pounds chicken drumsticks (about 8), skinned

1. In a gallon-size sealable plastic bag, combine the ketchup, vinegar, barbecue sauce, Worcestershire sauce and lemon juice; add the brown sugar (if necessary) and the chicken; seal the bag, squeezing out the air; turn to coat the chicken. Refrigerate at least two hours, turning the bag occasionally.

2. Spray the grill rack with nonstick cooking spray; set aside. Preheat the grill. Drain and discard the marinade. Grill the chicken until the juices run clear when the chicken is pierced with a fork, about six minutes on each side.

All of these recipes are from the Weight Watchers 1-2-3 Success Recipe Collection and contain less than 30 percent of calories from fat.

These dishes will definitely tempt your tastebuds and your family will want them again and again. And you can enjoy the ease of preparation and feel good about serving healthy, low-fat meals.

I read every one of your letters and I love your comments. Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, MI 48334. For more information on Weight Watchers, call 1-888-3FLORINE.

(Florine Mark is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation.)



DR. KEITH LEVICK

TO YOUR HEALTH

Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series by Dr. Keith Levick on the issue of overweight children. Part two is scheduled to run Sunday, Sept. 27.

As we become fatter, so unfortunately do our children. Like adults, overweight children are prone to a variety of health problems. Heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and psychological problems are commonly associated with obesity.

Children, however, are different from adults and therefore the treatment protocol is challenging. This two-part series examines childhood obesity from a "firsthand" perspective.

As director of the Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills, a behavioral/education program for kids ages 6-14, I've been able to identify five variables associated with overweight children.

The anecdotal information below is not a result of scientific research. Rather, it stems from 11 years of working with overweight children and their families. As a researcher, it's important to convey the difference between information resulting from my own observations as opposed to clinical scientific data. Nevertheless, this data not only contributes to the understanding of childhood obesity but also parallels current research.

powerless from the stress and pressures of everyday living. They need a sense of control and stability. To gain this control, many children — and adults — turn to food, alcohol and drugs.

Food, like other external substances, provides a source of comfort. We've been conditioned to link food to our emotions and behavior. Some of us, therefore, turn to food when feeling upset, angry, depressed or bored.

When a family experiences emotional distress, death, divorce or other upheaval, children may use food to help them feel good and provide a sense of control. In the end, little Johnny becomes heavier and heavier.

2. **Parents pressure children to be thin or not to be overweight.** This category involves parents who want their child to be like them or not to be like them. Mrs. A. Robie arrives for her appointment and expresses to me her concern about her overweight 9 year old. Mrs. A. daughter is overweight when her family members are lean. She teaches aerobics four days a week and her husband is a marathon runner.

The next appointment is with Mr. I.M. Fat. His concern is with his 12-year-old child, who is built just like him. He wants to protect his son from the ridicule and pain he experienced as an overweight child.

Both parents are concerned and want to help their children. Although scenarios appear to be different, a common theme emerges: In both examples, the parents are pressuring their children to be or not to be like them.

The children rebel to the pressure. It's similar to the control issue discussed in the first category. No one likes to be told what to do. The knee-jerk reaction to this type of order is to act to the contrary. The children are rebelling against their parents' reaction to them in both cases.

(Dr. Keith Levick is a health psychologist and the director of the Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills. You can reach him at 248-681-0025 or send him an e-mail at klevick@aol.com.)

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