

[IMAGE]

Healthy 10-Minute Meals

By Dr. Claudia Anrig

If you're a busy parent or are just busy in general, you know it can be a real challenge, especially during the week, to find time to feed yourself and your family without relying on fast food or prepared items, which generally lack the balanced nutrition we all need. How can you prepare healthy meals in a pinch? One of the foundational rules for getting a healthy meal on the table in 10 minutes or less is proper planning, and Sunday is the ideal day to plan out meals for the entire week. In particular, prep for those days that you know that you are going to be particularly busy; days when you know you'll be working late, rushing around getting the kids to soccer practice or dance classes, etc. Menu planning three to four days ahead can make a world of difference and prevent those last-minute poor choices that put a dent in your budget and your health.

Here's an easy way to get started: Brainstorm six to eight menus you can choose from whenever the need arises. Having that many options allows you to avoid repetition and gives you the freedom to mix things up. For example, if you know that one or two nights will be busy for you next week, you'll have something to fall back on without repeating yourself too many times in a month. When you're planning menus, also think about how many different meals you can create using a limited number of ingredients; that way, you can prep several meals at the same time.

Healthy meals - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Once you've chosen your menus, shop and prep in advance. That means doing everything from grilling chicken to chopping up vegetables to boiling rice or pasta. In some cases, you can completely finish the meal so it only requires reheating during your busy evenings. You can decide how much time you'll have and which foods can be partially prepared and which can be completely prepared in advance and still last for as long as you need them.

When time is at a premium, also keep in mind that these days, there are a variety of cooking tools that can help make the process easier. For example, a great tool that is regaining popularity in many households is the slow cooker. If vegetables, lean meat and potatoes are all chopped and sealed in separate bags on Sunday, it will only take you five minutes on a weekday morning to mix them with some water and then add stock and your favorite spices. Turn the slow cooker on, start your busy day and come home to a finished

dinner. Also, many ranges and microwaves now have delay-start features, which lets you prepare a meal, put it in the oven and set it to start cooking when you want it to, so it's ready when you need it to be ready.

Healthy 10-Minute Meals

Turkey Taco Salad

- Healthy meals soup - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Cook lean or extra-lean ground turkey thoroughly with seasoning.
- Crumble it and arrange in the center of a bed of lettuce (which can be pre-washed and bagged).
- Have the kids add warm or cool pinto, kidney, white or garbanzo beans.
- Garnish the plate with baked taco chips and salsa, which can be used as a dressing.
- Add a small amount of shredded cheese to top it all off.

Three Bean Turkey Chili

This takes 45 minutes of prep time, but only 10 minutes to get on your table for dinner. On your prep day, brown 1-2 pounds of lean ground turkey and crumble it in a large soup bowl with olive oil. Then add the following:

- 2 garlic cloves or 1 tablespoon crushed garlic
- 1 large diced onion
- 1 diced jalapeno pepper
- 2 (15 ounce each) cans of kidney, pinto and garbanzo beans
- Half a cup of corn
- Half a cup of diced celery
- 2 cups of vegetable stock or water
- 28 ounces of whole tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- Salt to taste

Bring to a boil and then simmer for 35 minutes. Let cool and store it for your upcoming busy week. When you need it, just warm it up and garnish with baked chips and low-fat shredded cheese. This is great as an after-school snack or for your main dinner meal.

Chicken Wrap

- Slice and shred a pre-cooked chicken (you can pick it up at the store on a weekday evening or prep it on Sunday).
- Place in a large bowl and mix with the following ingredients: half cup red bell pepper (thinly sliced); 3 medium carrots and 1 cucumber, cut into matchsticks; 3 tablespoons of bottled vinaigrette; and shredded lettuce.
- Warm tortillas (they can be gluten-free) wraps or flatbread.
- To raise the veggie count for this meal, add a salad and a healthy salad dressing.

Beef and Vegetable Stew

Healthy meals soup - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Your prep time is less than 15 minutes, but you'll need a slow cooker; cooking time is around 4-5 hours with high setting, 8-9 hours with low setting). Begin by browning 3 lbs of boneless beef chuck with olive oil. Add to the slow cooker with the following ingredients:

- 1 cup each of beef broth and red wine (skip the red wine if you have children, of course)
- Half a pound of frozen pearl onions or 1 chopped yellow onion
- Half a pound each of baby carrots and chopped zucchini (mushrooms and squash can also be used)
- 1 tablespoon of chopped garlic
- Salt and pepper to taste.

Additional ideas include adding 2 chopped turkey bacon slices for flavor or 2 tablespoons of tomato paste to thicken.

Remember, prep time is the most important thing when it comes to ensuring you and your family get healthy meals during even the most hectic week. If you are having difficulty creating your 10-minute menus, check online; there are countless sites that offer recipes, some that use as little as five ingredients. You can also ask a friend, neighbor, co-worker or family member to share a recipe that has worked for them in a pinch.

A final point: Don't do it all yourself! Prep time is the perfect time to involve the family. As long as your children are old enough to use knives safely, they can participate in cutting and chopping vegetables, fruit or

anything else you may need for your 10-minute meals. And younger children can help with smaller jobs that will still save you time, like getting cans from the pantry or vegetables from the refrigerator. Work together and make yourself some 10-minute meals that will make your life a whole lot easier - and healthier

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