Exploring New Tools for Healthy Family Meals

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“Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well.”

Michael Pollan
Setting the Table for Success

1. Nutrition after treatment
2. Recommendations for cancer survivors
3. Eating together
4. Making changes that last
5. Resources to navigate family meals
Why is nutrition important?

- Childhood cancer survivors have lower intake of vegetables and fruit and low fiber intake overall when compared with guidelines. This is also linked to poor diets as adults.

- Poor diet quality may contribute to higher risk of chronic health problems in childhood cancer survivors.

Nutrition After Treatment

Challenges of eating after treatment include

- Taste and texture aversions to food
- Bad memories of certain foods
- Compromised digestion
Nutrition Guidelines for Cancer Survivors

Recommendations for reducing cancer risk

1. Eat a high fiber diet
2. Cook more at home
3. Maintain a healthy weight
4. Keep moving
5. Limit alcohol consumption
6. Don’t rely on supplements
Nutrition Guidelines for Cancer Survivors (continued)

Phytonutrients

Phyto = plant
Phyto + nutrients = Nourishing substances made by plants

- Promote eye, skin, heart, brain and digestive health
- Act as antioxidants to protect against free radicals
- Repair DNA, can cause cancer cells to die
- Promote hormone balance

Phytonutrients often provide color to plants – Eat a variety of colors
Nutrition Guidelines for Cancer Survivors (continued)

What foods contain phytonutrients?

- Vegetables and fruits
- Nuts and seeds
- Legumes
- Herbs and spices
Nutrition Guidelines for Cancer Survivors (continued)

1. Eat unprocessed foods
2. Eat a variety of foods
3. Change with the seasons, more color and flavor
4. Build a healthy gut
5. Don’t let yourself get very hungry
Eating Together

What research tells us

• There is a positive correlation between the number of family meals and healthier eating patterns, including higher intake of fruit and vegetables.

• Families in Mediterranean countries who spent more time eating meals together, without digital distractions, while enjoying pleasant conversations were more likely to follow a Mediterranean style diet.
Eating Together (continued)

Challenges of eating together include

- Finding food everyone will eat and enjoy
- Finding the time to prepare meals
- Including healthy foods
- Staying on budget
- NOT becoming a short order chef
Eating Together (continued)

Even in families, we have our own unique way of looking at food

When gathering at the table

• Make mealtime pleasant, no matter the food served
• Avoid food rules; There are no good foods or bad food
• Practice and demonstrate mindful eating; this means take the time to use your senses, relax, be in the present with the food and people you are around at that time
• Not all foods are going to work for everyone all the time, and this is ok
• Have some alternative foods available
Making Changes That Last

Making changes for a family is not unlike making changes for yourself. It may take some time. Most people don’t make a lifestyle change overnight.
Making Changes That Last (continued)

Why cook?

- More nutritious meals
- Save money
- Cooking can be therapeutic
- Encourages family bonding
- Accounts for individual preferences
Making Changes That Last (continued)

Build cooking skills

• Spend time trying new recipes
• Learn new skills in the kitchen
• Cook with family and friends

Vegetarian Tortilla Soup
Making Changes That Last (continued)

Cooking together

• Allow everyone to participate in meal selection
• Make the preparation as enjoyable as the meal
• Learn new skills together
• Repeat meals that people enjoy preparing
Making Changes That Last (continued)

Become a competent eater

• Take time to eat
• Build a meal/snack routine that works for you
• Include foods you enjoy
• Make eating times relaxing, allow yourself to be in the moment
• Try new foods as you are ready
Resources to Navigate Family Meals

Getting started

- Set meal days and times
- Build a list of meals everyone enjoys now
- Set a budget
- Add one new recipe a week
- Make a weekly meal plan using tried and true recipes with new meal additions
- Set a shopping list and stick to it
- Clean out your pantry and refrigerator
- Ask for participation
Resources to Navigate Family Meals (continued)

Meal ideas

- Have a meal that each person can build to suit their individual tastes
  - Taco night
  - Grain bowls
  - Build your own pizza and salad

This approach allows for making substitutions for food sensitivities, allergies or individual preferences.
Resources to Navigate Family Meals (continued)

Get inspired:
Easy Family Meal Dinners

Encourage participation:
Recipes the Whole Family Can Make
Planning around food preferences or medically prescribed diets can be stressful for the planner. Find resources that will work with these challenges.

Cook for Your Life’s recipe database will filter for

- Health considerations (Healthy Survivorship, Fatigue, High Calorie, etc.)
- Meals (main, breakfast, snack, healthy holidays, beverages, etc.)
- Preferences (dairy free, healthy comfort, kid-friendly, etc.)
- Preparation (3 steps or less, 5 ingredients or less, one pot, quick and easy, freezer friendly, etc.)
Resources to Navigate Family Meals (continued)

Sorting through the vast amount of information takes time. Build your knowledge base and learn where to find reliable information.

- American Institute for Cancer Research → www.aicr.org
- The Ellyn Sattyr Institute Eat and Feed with Joy → ellynsatterinstitute.org
- Cook for Your Life → www.cookforyourlife.org
One-Week Sample Menu

Sunday -> Chicken burgers with oven roasted sweet potato fries
Monday -> Vegetable lasagna with salad
Tuesday -> Black bean chili with brown rice and a vegetable plate
Wednesday -> Baked salmon with rainbow fried rice and roasted broccoli
Thursday -> Frittata with leafy greens and a vegetable plate
Friday -> Build your own taco dinner with Mexican cabbage salad
Thank you!

Never eat anything you don't enjoy and truly enjoy everything you eat.