

# Good Nutrition for **Busy** Families

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## Are You an Effective Kitchen **Time** Manager?

Frequently  
Sometimes  
Almost Never

- How often do you plan meals in advance?
- How often do you prepare portions of a meal in advance?
- How often do you spend 30 minutes or less preparing meal?
- How often do you use leftovers as the basis for another meal?
- How often do you use mixes, frozen dinners and entrees, and ready-to-eat foods in your menu?
- If there are others in your household, how often do they help fix meals and clean up?



If you answered “always” or “frequently” to the questions, you probably manage your time very well. If you answered with “sometimes” or “almost never,” don’t throw in the dish towel! This brochure can provide some ideas to streamline your cooking while providing nutritious meals for your family.

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## Ring the Dinner Bell for Family Meals



With work, meetings and school activities, families have many distractions that keep them away from the family table. Eating together, however, has many benefits. Family meals promote communication skills, cooperation, cooking skills and table manners. Families who eat together also tend to eat more nutritiously. Further, children who help prepare a meal tend to eat the food prepared. Keep these suggestions in mind:

- Be creative and flexible with meal schedules to allow for common meal times.
- Keep mealtime positive. The dinner table is not the appropriate place for discipline.
- Involve family members in meal planning and grocery shopping.
- Share responsibilities for meal preparation. Even preschoolers can help set the table.
- Turn off the TV and put away newspapers and magazines during mealtime.
- Agree not to take phone calls during meals.

*"I prefer Hostess Fruit Pies to pop-up toaster tarts because they don't require so much cooking."*

Carrie Snow



## Speed Scratch Meals: Homemade for the 90s

Many people are dodging cooking these days, often due to a lack of time and/or knowledge. In a recent Betty Crocker kitchens cooking quiz, 70 percent of the participants rated themselves "above average" in cooking knowledge. Only 38 percent actually scored "above average" in cooking knowledge.

Getting a nutritious dinner on the table fast — and homemade — doesn't have to be a struggle when you use some of the new products that are available. "Speed scratch" is the term given to the combination of readily-available or ready-to-use fresh foods with packaged or processed foods.

Efficient meal preparation begins with planning and organization. Planning menus in advance has many advantages. It saves time and effort, encourages variety and good nutrition and can save money. Many people plan a week's worth of menus based on grocery store ads. Increase your efficiency with these tips:

- Organize your kitchen so foods, utensils and equipment are arranged conveniently for fast-paced work.
- Stock your kitchen with quick-to-fix ingredients.
- Keep a note on the refrigerator to list items as you need them. Arrange your shopping list and coupons to fit the layout of the grocery store.
- Read recipes ahead of time to be sure you have the ingredients.



## Plan for Leftovers

Think "planned-overs" not "leftovers." Make efficient use of large meat cuts and other foods that come in large packages. Prepare extra portions of chili, soup or meat, put in freezer containers and label, date and freeze for quick meals later. Also use planned-over foods in a totally different way from the original meal. For example, use planned-over chicken or beef in tacos or fajitas.

## Streamline Your Recipes and Menus

Evaluate your recipes: How many ingredients and steps are included? Can any ingredients be changed to save preparation time? Can any preparation steps be combined or eliminated?

Choose recipes that meet your time requirements. Consider “active time” and “total time.” Active time measures the time actually spent preparing a food. Total time measures how long it takes to get a meal ready from start to finish. For instance, if your family descends on the table at 6 p.m., and you are deciding on the menu at 5:30 p.m., a roast definitely is not on the menu. On the other hand, if you only have a few minutes for preparation but dinner is hours away, a roast makes sense because of the low amount of active time required. To cut time, keep these suggestions in mind:

- Focus preparation efforts on one portion of the meal. If the main course is time-consuming, fix a simple vegetable or salad.
- Assemble equipment, cooking utensils and ingredients before you start meal preparation.
- Use time-saving equipment such as crockpots and microwave ovens.
- Use the one-pot method. For instance, cut time by adding vegetables to pasta that is cooking.
- Consider quick-cooking menu items. For example, team fish, which cooks in minutes, with couscous or pasta and microwaved fresh vegetables.

## Keep Good Nutrition in Mind

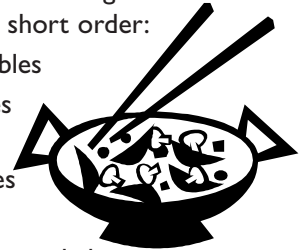
Shared meals don't have to elaborate. If your day leaves you frazzled, but your budget tells you to eat at home, simplify your cooking style. Try some of the new speed scratch items, use your planned-overs, divide up kitchen duties and ring the dinner bell. Your family will benefit in many ways.

## Try Some Full Speed Ingredients

Food companies have introduced dozens of convenient “speed scratch” products to speed up cooking. Some of the new products have been designed to be lower in fat, sodium and/or calories. Read the “Nutrition Facts” panel on food labels to learn more about your choices.

Some foods like pasta and couscous cook in minutes. If you are in a rush, shop the salad bar vegetables for pre-sliced mushrooms, broccoli and cauliflower florets or chopped onions to be used in stir-fry or soup. Try some of the following and have a nutritious meal on the table in short order:

- Pre-washed, pre-cut vegetables
- Pre-packaged stir-fry veggies with their own sauce
- Frozen pasta with vegetables
- Frozen fajita kits
- One-step dressings for potato salad, tuna salad and coleslaw
- Salad dressing mixes
- Pasta salad mixes, which require oil or mayonnaise to be added
- Packaged flavorings for oven-roasted potatoes
- Prepared spaghetti sauce
- Prepared gravy and meat sauce
- Pre-chopped garlic in jars
- Boneless, skinless chicken breasts or presliced stir-fry meats
- Frozen bread dough
- Shredded cheese
- Salsa as an instant cooking sauce on chicken, ground beef or pork chops



*“In cooking, as in all the arts, simplicity is the sign of perfection.”*

Curnonsky

## Homemade Meals in Minutes

### Pizza

Recipe Preparation Time:

**Active:** 10 minutes **Total:** 25 minutes

- 1 refrigerated pizza crust, 12-inch diameter
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup canned pizza sauce
- 1 small onion, sliced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  small green pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 cup mushrooms, fresh, sliced
- 1 cup (about 4 oz) mozzarella cheese, part-skim milk, shredded

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Place crust on ungreased pizza pan or baking sheet.
3. Mix puree, oregano, and garlic powder. Spread evenly over crust.
4. Place vegetables on top of puree.
5. Sprinkle with cheese.
6. Bake until cheese melts and vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes.

#### Makes 4 servings

Nutrition information per serving of pizza:

Calories: 275; Total fat: 6 grams; Saturated fat: 3 grams; Cholesterol: 15 milligrams; Sodium: 404 milligrams

**Speed scratch menu idea:** Serve with pre-cut vegetables and low-fat ranch dressing, juice-pack canned peaches or fresh fruit and low-fat milk.

**More than 400 recipes with nutrition information are available on-line at**

**[www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/food.htm)**

(Click on “Nutrition” then “Prairie Fare.”)

## Homemade Meals in Minutes

### Quick Chili

Recipe Preparation Time

**Active:** 10 minutes **Total:** 20 minutes

- $\frac{1}{2}$  pound lean ground beef
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce can kidney beans, drained (save liquid)
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup bean liquid
- 1 cup canned tomato puree, no-salt added
- 1 tablespoon instant minced onion
- $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons chili powder

1. Brown beef and drain off fat.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients.
3. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 10 minutes.

#### Makes 4 servings

Nutrition information per serving of chili:

Calories: 230; Total fat: 9 grams; Saturated fat: 3 grams; Cholesterol: 34 milligrams; Sodium: 390 milligrams

**Speed scratch menu idea:** serve with whole wheat rolls made from frozen bread dough, pre-packaged salad with lowfat dressing, frozen yogurt with fruit and low-fat milk.

#### Make extra chili for “planned overs.”

##### Use the rest to:

- Top baked potatoes
- Make an easy casserole by combining cooked pasta shells with planned-over chili
- Make a quick and easy taco salad by topping lettuce with planned-over chili, diced tomatoes and shredded cheese.

**References:** Shopping for Food & Making Meals in Minutes. USDA Home and Garden Bulletin No. 232-10; Cooking from Scratch Goes Full Speed. American Demographics, March 1995; National Pork Producer’s Council, Des Moines, IA.

**For more information on this and other topics, see: [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu)**

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