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Careful Planning = Good Family Meals

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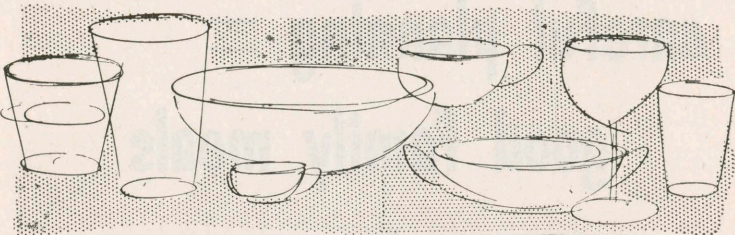
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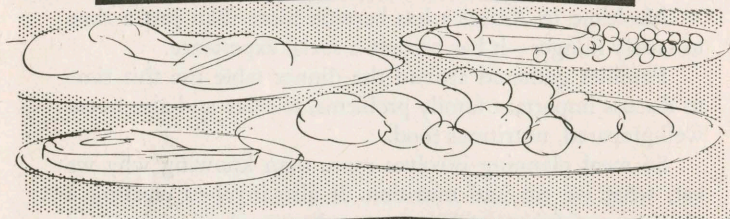
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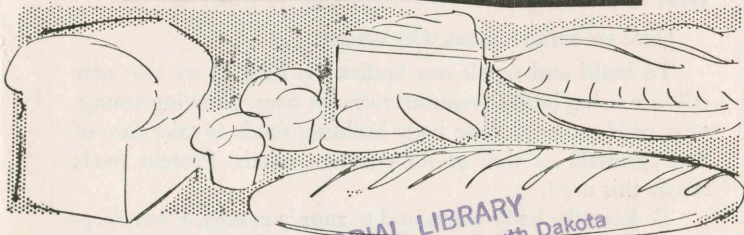
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careful planning =



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careful planning = good family meals

By

Jane Meyers

Extension Nutritionist

Mealtime in America has become more than just a time to satisfy hunger—it has become a social experience.

Families gathered around the dinner table use this time to discuss important family problems, to relax and also to eat well-prepared, nutritious food.

So meal planning involves more than knowing why we eat, what we eat and nutrition. It also involves creating a pleasant, satisfying mealtime atmosphere, and using time and money and energy efficiently in food preparation.

Let's examine some of these meal planning guides.

WHY DO WE EAT?

Here are some reasons why we eat:

To build and repair our bodies. As long as we live new cells are being built to replace worn out ones. Growing youngsters need more of these body building foods to take care of their growth, as well as for constant repair. Protein foods satisfy this need.

To keep the body warm and to supply energy. Even sleeping requires energy for the simple maintenance of body processes, and every activity in which you participate means you need more energy. Carbohydrates are the principal energy-giving foods.

To protect health and to regulate body processes. Our bodies are complex organisms that constantly need regulating to continue to operate well. Breathing, digestion and beating of the heart are only a few of the processes which must be kept in proper working order. Fruits and vegetables provide us with body regulating vitamins and minerals.

To keep us psychologically happy. We use mealtime to sit together, relax together, and talk together. Attractive, well-prepared foods—served in a pleasant family atmosphere—fill this need.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

Basic menu planning will probably remain the same, or at least similar to what we now know. The three daily meals follow certain basic patterns. Here they are:

Breakfast

Fruit
Cereal with Milk
and/or
Meat, Egg, etc.

Bread

Butter

Drink

Dinner

Meat or Protein Dish
Starchy Vegetable
Green, Leafy or
Yellow Vegetable
Salad and/or Dessert
Bread Butter

Drink

Supper or Lunch

Protein Dish
Vegetable and/or Salad
Bread Butter
Dessert (optional)
Drink

By using these patterns, you will find that meal planning is simplified. Another way to plan a dinner is as follows: decide on your meat, add two vegetables (one green and one starchy), then add a salad. In this order the foods are easier to select.

When planning your meals, you may have three generations of individuals to consider. No one wants to plan and prepare three or more different menus; so you should learn how one basic menu can be adapted for different age groups and situations.

Little children want easy-to-eat foods with little seasoning and at a moderate temperature—neither hot nor cold. They need small servings, too, and shouldn't be expected to eat large helpings.

Teen agers need more protein and energy foods than adults. They need the protein for growth and the energy for all their many activities. Be sure teen agers get four glasses of milk each day, too! Their bones are still maturing.

Older folks need foods similar to those required by the young child. They should be easy to eat and easy to digest. Older people may find that eating more often, with less food at each meal, is more satisfying.

Pregnant and nursing mothers need special attention, too. Pregnant women need four glasses of milk daily, extra fruits (especially citrus) and vegetables, an extra serving of meat and eggs, and liver once a week. Nursing mothers need even more of those foods.

MEASURING NUTRITION

Everybody needs a balanced diet, and that means each and every person's meals can be checked against the nutrition yardstick. Be sure to consider all the meals of the day when checking. No one meal can be perfect by itself: the yardstick measures a full day.

When you've planned your meals for one day, then check them with this nutrition yardstick. The recently-developed "Essentials of an Adequate Diet" are easy to remember, and easy to use as your guide to good nutrition.

Check for these groups:

Meat Group

Includes meat, poultry, fish and eggs. Eat 1 serving of meat daily, at least 3 eggs each week (1 a day is better).

Fruit-Vegetable Group

Eat 1 serving green or yellow vegetable, 1 serving citrus or tomato and 2 of other fruits and vegetables.

Milk Group

Children—4 glasses; Adults—2 glasses; Pregnant and lactating women—4 and 6; Adolescents—4 glasses.

Cereal Group

Includes bread, cereals and flour products. Eat 3 or more servings daily.

MEASURING SATISFACTION

There's another yardstick to use, too. This one measures satisfaction to your family. And who doesn't want that? When planning your meals, think about color: do you have enough contrast, yet not too much? How about texture: do you have something crisp and something soft? Flavor: do you have something tart and something sweet? And temperature: are some foods cold and some warm?

As with anything else, your family wants variety and appeal in food . . . not only to the taste buds, but to the eyes as well. For a large part, we do eat with our eyes. As an extreme example, imagine a meal of fish, cauliflower, potatoes, and vanilla pudding! Each food is good, but together they're not at all appealing.

Another very important part of the pre-planning is to plan the method of preparation you'll use. Try to retain the most food value. For instance, Vitamin C is destroyed by heat, so cooked cabbage is not nearly so valuable as raw cabbage. B vitamins are water soluble . . . that's why you use as little cooking water as possible, do not throw it away.

Once you find a menu you and your family like, write it down on a recipe card and file it away for future reference. Just as recipes are filed for future reference, menus can be too. When you're at a loss for ideas, one of these carefully-filed menus may come to the rescue.

Actually, it's impossible to measure satisfactions, but every wife and mother wants to be sure her family is satisfied. There's more to food than nourishment, as was hinted earlier, and there's more to satisfactions than crisping the carrots!

Physical surroundings are important. Chairs should be of comfortable height; each person needs plenty of elbow room; lighting should be adequate.

Even more important than physical surroundings are emotional surroundings. So make mealtime a happy time in your home, and a time that is thoroughly enjoyed by all. Did you know that food digests better and is put to better nutritional use in a happy emotional climate? If mealtime is happy and comfortable, food problems are likely to be less, too. Many food likes and dislikes are directly related to an emotional experience. Food just doesn't taste good during an argument!

Try not to make an issue out of food likes and dislikes. Children and husbands don't waste away; but mothers do! Food likes and dislikes aren't something to be argued about, they're facts to be subtly coped with. If you serve a food and it's rejected, fix it another way and try again another day. And remember: there are very few foods that are irreplaceable!

Too often our families eat on the run. Set up the ritual of eating together. It's good for each one individually, and marvelous for you as a group. In this day and age, mealtime may be your only chance for true family interaction.

Mealtime can be made extra special, too. Use your best dishes and silver more often. Rig up some napkin rings, and use cloth napkins for several meals. Or unpack that lovely glass dish and use it as a centerpiece. The family will love being treated like company. And, after all, aren't they *just* as important?

Create an aura of good feeling, a bit of glamour around the family table. Remember, man does not live by bread alone.

CONSERVE TIME AND ENERGY

Now that you've decided what to serve, and how to serve it, let's see what can be done to save time and energy. "Time is the stuff life is made of: therefore, do not waste time," are the words of Benjamin Franklin. There are too many other interesting things to do to spend whole days in the kitchen . . . let's keep meal preparation time at a logical minimum!

Do you use prepared mixes, or homemade mixes? Sometimes one type is cheaper, sometimes another. Figure the cost in money, time and energy. Then you can make a good choice.

Do you often use one heat source to prepare a whole meal? Such as an oven meal, a broiler meal, or a stew—all in one pot. That technique will save you fuel costs, time and

energy. Less dishes, too. Do you plan for leftovers? You're bound to have leftovers at some time or other, and it's much more interesting to make them unrecognizable the next time they're served. It also saves time when you plan, for instance, to have left over mashed potatoes to make potato patties. When you know you'll be in a hurry, plan to have some left over foods that can be prepared quickly and easily.

Do you prepare food for a later meal while you're in the kitchen working on one already? You always have spare minutes during meal preparation; put them to use by preparing for a later meal.

Do you plan your menus at least 3 days in advance? If you do, it saves marketing time. When you know what you want at the grocery, and have the meals at least tentatively planned, it's only necessary to market about twice a week—a saving of both time and energy.

Do you plan and buy the most economical unit possible? Flour, sugar and some other staples are less expensive when purchased in bulk. There are two sides to every question, though, and when storage space limits the amount you buy, or you have a very small family, it's relatively more expensive to buy in large quantity.

Do you buy or use a food that fits the purpose? You can use a lower quality food for a family casserole dish than you can for an individual food served to company. Take peas, for example. Unsized peas are perfectly acceptable for a combination dish, whereas you will want evenly sized peas when you serve them as the meal's vegetable.

There's an inexpensive food for every expensive one. Do you take advantage of these? Canned orange juice is less expensive than frozen, which is lower priced than fresh oranges. But you get nearly the same food value from all three. This is true for almost all foods. T-bone steak is more expensive than round steak, which in turn is higher than chuck roast. Yet, all contribute the same value to your meals, and can be prepared to be equally tasty.

Do you consciously try to simplify your daily tasks of cooking? Study yourself and your movements some day soon and see how you can ease the work you're doing. Eliminate an unnecessary step in the job; reorganize your small equipment locations to save steps; combine some processes; adjust your standards to make the end product simpler, or easier to prepare, and thus, eliminate work.

Are you ready to plan meals now? Be sure to consider these things:

Why we eat . . . What we eat . . . How we measure nutrition . . . How we measure satisfactions . . . How we measure efficiency.