

PLANNING HEALTHY MEALS.....AHEAD OF TIME

The statistics on obesity and the out of shape American are bombarding us. Your life is high in stress and calories and low in free time and physical activity. Experts are now saying that the cause is the result of a frenetic lifestyle and we need to begin changing behavior. Change on this scale takes decades. It has been recognized that initiatives designed to help children have the best likelihood of gaining public support. Although, there is no quick fix to this rising epidemic small changes at home that include the entire family can make a big difference.

Parents play the lead role in orchestrating how mealtime is executed and what foods are brought into the home. Processed foods and fast food gained popularity as families found less time to sit down and eat and together and to prepare meals. How can we make small changes in our lifestyle to begin promoting a healthier United States? Will children welcome brown rice and fresh vegetables over processed chicken tenders and instant potatoes? There is a groundswell movement on the way to dramatically revise what we eat and to bring back fresh food and backyard baseball.

Children develop habits and routines from the adults in their lives. Teach your children the importance of planning ahead by creating the "family menu." Educate children early on the value of proper nutrition and engage them in the meal planning process, children are more likely to eat foods they choose and help prepare. Introduce your children to new vegetables and whole grain foods. For older children talk about how whole grains are fundamental to feeling satisfied and maintaining lasting energy. Talk to your children about the history of the fast food industry and how it has helped lead to the national obesity crisis. Brainstorm as a family about what you can do to eat healthier, be sure to include selections for those nights when you are over scheduled.

Making lifestyle changes for your family may seem overwhelming. The hectic schedule is already in place, and survival depends on your already established routine and frequent fast food meals. Start slowly, your effort and commitment will provide your children with a gift that can last a lifetime.

Below are some simple tips to keep good nutrition on the table:

- ✚ **Plan Ahead-** Generate a list of family favorite healthy meals. Get ingredients and dinner ready in the morning or on weekends if possible.
- ✚ **Combine Cooking and Family Time-** Choose tasks to match their ability and that make your job easier such as washing vegetables, wrapping potatoes, getting out ingredients or setting the table. It's a great opportunity to catch up with the kids while teaching them to be comfortable in the kitchen.
- ✚ **Double Up-** Make an extra batch when you cook main-dish items such as chili, soups or sauces and freeze them. Be sure to date and label each item.