

## Health eating for a healthy New Year



By Leanna Knox

The New Year offers a fresh, new start for all of us. For many people this means lots of ideas on how to live healthier, get in shape and improve themselves. A big part of all of this is healthy eating. However, our fast-paced lives often leave little time for cooking. In fact, it seems that family life gets busier and moves faster every year. Being rushed means that our eating habits are often not as healthy as they could be. Getting dinner on the table can mean calling for a pizza or dashing into the grocery store on the way home to pick up a ready-to-eat dinner. If the way you and your family are doing dinner now is not exactly positive for your health or waistline, then 2010 is the perfect time to make some healthy changes to your eating habits!

One of the big concerns for many people is that shifting towards a healthier diet will mean more shopping and cooking, and a lot less free time. This does not necessarily have to be the case. It is possible to make healthier meals at home without a lot of time or hassle. It just requires a few simple strategies to help to make it happen.

### *Start with a bit of planning*

Set aside a few minutes every week to develop a quick plan for the upcoming week. While this might sound timeconsuming, it will really save time and energy on trips to the grocery store for forgotten items, or the need to call for pizza when the cupboards are bare! Think about what your family would like to eat for meals over the coming week, taking into account the family's schedule to identify days when the pressure will really be on to get supper on the table in a hurry. Plan what you will need for breakfast, lunch and dinners for the week and then check what foods you have on hand in the fridge, freezer and pantry. Put any missing items on a shopping list to be sure you will have everything you need to put your plan in action.

### *Stock up on healthy convenience*

While it may seem tempting to grab a frozen entrée at the grocery store, many of these are higher in fat and sodium, not to mention price, than homemade meals. Yet there are definitely some grocery store items which fit well with healthy eating and can help to ease the meal-time rush. Many grocery stores offer ready-made salads and meals that offer a nutritious option to a trip through the drive-thru. Fill your kitchen with healthy convenience items such as pizza shells, whole grain pasta, lower-fat sauces, frozen fruit and vegetables, frozen fish, lean meats, pre-washed salads, canned beans and shredded cheese. Having the right things on hand is an important part of getting healthy meals on the table.

### ***Be ready to cook up healthy choices***

Healthy cooking in a hurry starts with the right recipes. This is not the place for complicated, time-consuming dishes. Instead, look for easy-to-prepare, healthy recipes that the whole family enjoys. As a rule of thumb, choose recipes that have no more than about eight ingredients in them. These ingredients should be simple and easy to find. Look for a recipe that has either a short cooking time so that it can be pulled together when time is tight, or is something that can be popped in the oven and requires little attention, freeing everyone up for other activities on a busy night. Keep the ingredients of a few of these dishes on hand so that you can pull together a healthy meal when time is tight.

### ***Pull together healthy and convenient meals***

Use convenience foods to help you to create fast and healthy meals for the whole family. For a quick meal start with a frozen cheese pizza, top it with sliced mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers and onions to boost the nutritional value, and serve a slice or two with a side salad. Or, try a steamed fish dinner – place fish in a steamer over a pot of boiling water, add your favourite vegetables, then cover and cook for about five minutes, until fish flakes easily with a fork. Pasta primavera is a quick, healthy meal – boil pasta, steam pre-cut broccoli or cauliflower, and toss with tomato sauce. In the mood for something spicy? Cook boneless chicken strips in a non-stick pan until meat is done, then add carrots, green peppers and onions and cook until soft. Finally, add a handful of raisins and curry powder to taste, and then serve on top of couscous. These tasty meals can be on the table for your family to enjoy in less time than it would take to call for take-out!

With the New Year here, shifting to healthier habits is a great resolution. Skipping meals, eating poorly and being stressed can lower resistance to colds and flu – and contribute to unwanted weight gain. While grabbing a fast-food meal or calling for a pizza may seem like the only option on a busy night, there are alternatives! Plan

what you need, stock up on the right ingredients and recipes, and use convenience items to help you to get a healthy meal on the table in a hurry. Make 2010 a wonderful year for the whole family – starting with healthy eating for all.

*This article originally appeared in the January 2010 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.*