

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



I'm married to a Gourmet Cook with the latest kitchen gadget!

When my husband, John, decided to retire early from Texas A&M, I made a deal with him. Upon making his leap into blissful retirement, he would agree to start cooking at least half of the meals. Believe it or not, he jumped at the prospect of becoming a gourmet genius!

Being the scientist and ever curious life-long student of life, he definitely leaped into all the great cook books out there, took "crepe cuisine" cooking among others, and started buying all kinds of kitchen gadgets. He intends to visit *Kiss the Cook* here in Boerne often to see the latest tool of the trade. And let us not forget all the fresh and dried herbs available today. Our stove-side cupboard has every assortment known to man! He even bought *me* a fancy Wok one Christmas. The so-called "wok" present was like receiving a bowling ball that only fits HIS fingers!

Sometimes I feel like I'm married to Tim Taylor's "Home Improvement" clone! Does that mean my husband has Jill Taylor's clone, along with her regrettable no talent cooking skills? You will have to ask my husband. I sure won't admit it! But who am I to complain. It's been a wonderful past seven years

of delightful repose from the thirty year rigors of trying to figure out what to pack for lunch and cook for supper. Today, while working in my office or coming home from a busy day with a client, I hear those delightful words ring out.

No, it's not "Hi, honey, I love you." It's "Dinner's ready!" –adoring music to my ears! Every time he asks how I like the meal, I *a/ways* say fantastic. He's getting the hint that I'm just making sure he keeps it up for our next forty+ years together! My routine statement is "You fix it, I'll eat it, no matter what." One of the wonderful benefits of this arrangement is variety. I have definitely stretched my taste buds and experienced healthy dining at its best, right at home.

As with anyone, we also love to occasionally eat out. In the past year, Boerne has not only become known as an art and antique haven, but also a hamlet for the health-conscious appetite. The Dodging Duck, Cypress Grill, Limestone Grill/Ye Kendall Inn, Trinity Café, Peach Tree Café are just a few of the restaurants John and I have found met our discriminating taste buds. Remember, not everything on their menu is necessarily good for you but can be fun just once in a while (and I don't mean every few days)!

We also never turn down a national franchise that has great food, such as an occasional Chili's menu. But we always (maybe not always!) check the healthy meal list first that support the better fats, complex carbos, lean protein, and light desserts. We also routinely split a meal to reduce the calories and save on our budget. It's nice to see more restaurants offering the healthier route. Yet, there are no guarantees as you give them a try. I am hopeful you just may be pleasantly surprised. At the least, they will expand your taste bud horizons.

If you are not yet ready to expand your own culinary horizons, give yourself time and budget, but not too much time, to adjust beyond the heavy cheese pizza and burrito menu. The lean but gourmet foods will grow on you nicely. Even if it costs you a little more cash, it will be worth budgeting it in for your health and fun adventure.

The next issue will cover the assorted basic staples for making meal preparation easy on your time, health, and budget. In the meantime, here are some resources I hope will help make all the difference in menu planning, meal preparation, and enjoyable serving.

Resources:

About.com—kitchen & dining, <http://interiordec.about.com/od/kitchens1/>,

<http://interiordec.about.com/od/diningrooms/>

CDC—5ADay, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5ADay/>

Kiss The Cook, Boerne—products and classes (call to get on their interest list for cooking classes; ask for Janet or Bren), <http://www.kissthecooktx.com/>

Master Cookbook Deluxe 9 software

Meals Matter, <http://www.mealsmatter.org>

My Pyramid.gov—Menus, http://www.mypyramid.gov/tips_resources/menus.html,

Nutrition.gov—Shopping, cooking, meal planning, <http://www.nutrition.gov>

Recipe Source, <http://www.recipesource.com/>

Texas Cooking Schools, <http://www.schoolsforcooking.com/texas.html>

Tips for Eating Out, http://www.mypyramid.gov/tips_resources/eating_out.html

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What's in Your Pantry?

One of the more fun projects, at least for me, is to find out what my clients have in their pantry, refrigerator, freezer, and cupboards. It's always an adventure finding out what are their most favorites foods. My job is to help them design a healthier eating pattern that ups the nutrition and hopefully still eat some of their favorites.

I offer a one-page list, *What's in Your Pantry*, to check off whatever corresponds to what's hiding among the many culinary treasures. Whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, basic staples are on the list—along with a variety of wonderful whole foods, herbs, and spices. When clients are ready to change the foods they have in their pantry, refrigerator, and freezer, this diverse food list proves very helpful. They can then easily inventory their supplies to assess the variety and whole foods they want to start stocking

Meal preparation is often a meal on the run or home delivery for many families. Unfortunately, they miss out on the delight and fun of preparing and eating a healthy, appetizing meal together. For those of you who want to change the way meals are prepared and eaten in your home, my hope is that this month's topic will inspire and encourage you to do just that.

Foods come in all forms and are processed in a variety of ways—fresh, frozen, canned; mixed, spiced; minimally processed, highly processed. Unless you have your own vegetable and herb garden, plus fruit trees, all our purchased foods are processed to some degree. The rule of thumb I use is buy foods that come as whole as possible; then prepare foods with minimal processing as possible; and still be healthy and safe to consume. Animal protein should be cooked, that's for sure. For more information regarding food preparation and safety, go online to the Dept. of Agriculture website for a variety of tips. You can also consult a licensed nutritionist.

The food staples you have in your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer will determine how you support good nutrition for a healthy body and mind, how you garner more time not only for shared meal preparation but for other important family time together, and how you wisely spend your money within your budget.

Here is a sample of the pantry/refrigerator/freezer list of all the variety of food items for making meal preparation a fun adventure; and hopefully easy on your time, health, and budget. Remember, food comes in all forms (e.g. peanuts, peanut butter, peanut oil). What you decide to include in your pantry is impacted by your health condition and wellness goals. In addition, some staple items are only available in health food stores. Choose wisely and enjoy your shopping!

<p>Animal Proteins- Beef, Lean/extra lean Dairy Chicken + eggs (including broth) Fish/Freshwater-Bass, Salmon, Trout Fish/Saltwater-Cod, Flounder, Haddock, Mackerel, Mahi-mahi, Roughy, Sea Bass, Sea Trout, Sole, Sturgeon, Swordfish, Tuna, Whitefish Goat Lamb Pork Quail Turkey, Duck, Goose Venison</p>	<p>Fruits-</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="813 226 1101 829"> Apple Apricot Banana Blackberry Blueberry Boysenberry Cherry Coconut Cranberry Currant Date Elderberry Fig Grape/raisins Grapefruit, Guava Kiwi Lemon Lime </td> <td data-bbox="1101 226 1380 829"> Mango Melons-Cantaloupe, Honey Dew, Crenshaw, Casaba, Watermelon Nectarine, Orange Papaya Peach Pear, Persimmon Pineapple Plantain Plum (Prunes) Raspberry, Rosehip Strawberry Tangerine Wintergreen </td> </tr> </table>		Apple Apricot Banana Blackberry Blueberry Boysenberry Cherry Coconut Cranberry Currant Date Elderberry Fig Grape/raisins Grapefruit, Guava Kiwi Lemon Lime	Mango Melons-Cantaloupe, Honey Dew, Crenshaw, Casaba, Watermelon Nectarine, Orange Papaya Peach Pear, Persimmon Pineapple Plantain Plum (Prunes) Raspberry, Rosehip Strawberry Tangerine Wintergreen	
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<p>Oils/Fats/Vinegars- Almond Apple Cider Vinegar Balsamic Citrus-lime, lemon Corn Grape (wine vinegar) Olive Oil, virgin Peanut Red Wine Vinegar Rice Vinegar Safflower Sesame Soybean Sunflower Truffle (embellishment) Walnut</p>	<p>Sweets- Beet Sugar Cane Sugar Date Sugar Dextrose, Glucose Fructose (corn) Gelatin (plant) Honey (fructose, glucose) Maple Syrup Molasses Sorghum syrup Turbinado Sugar Vanilla</p>				
<p>Grains/Carbohydrates (incl. whole grain, pastas, flours)-</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="228 1430 516 1883"> Amaranthus Arrowroot Baking powder (corn) Baking powder (incl. Potato type) Baking Soda Barley, whole grain Corn (Corn Meal, Popcorn) Cous cous, whole Cream of tartar Jerusalem Artichoke Flour </td> <td data-bbox="516 1430 803 1883"> Millet Oats, whole oat groats Quinoa Rice, whole brown basmati Rye Spelt Tapioca Wheat (including bulgar) Wild Rice </td> </tr> </table>		Amaranthus Arrowroot Baking powder (corn) Baking powder (incl. Potato type) Baking Soda Barley, whole grain Corn (Corn Meal, Popcorn) Cous cous, whole Cream of tartar Jerusalem Artichoke Flour	Millet Oats, whole oat groats Quinoa Rice, whole brown basmati Rye Spelt Tapioca Wheat (including bulgar) Wild Rice	<p>Sauces/Condiments- Anchovy fillets in olive oil Bragg's Liquid Aminos Capers, salt- and brine-cured Fish sauce Horseradish Ketchup Mayonaise, light Mustard, hot-sweet, Dijon Olives Soy Sauce, dark , white Worchestershire sauce</p>	
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Vegetables-		Tea & Other Drinks-	
Artichoke	Lettuce-Heart, Butter	Alfalfa	
Asparagus	, Iceberg, Leaf,	Chamomile	
Avocado	Romaine	Fruits-all sorts	
Beans-Black, Green,	Mushrooms	Lemon Balm	
Soybean, Lentil,	Okra	Milk-Cow, Goat, Oat, Rice, Nuts, Soy	
Kidney,	Onion	Papaya	
Lima, Navy, Pinto	Peas, Black-eyed	Peppermint	
(including canned)	peas	Raspberry leaf	
Beets & Beet greens	Pumpkin	Rosehips	
Bell peppers	Radish	Spearmint	
Broccoli	Rhubarb	Strawberry leaf	
Brussels Sprouts	Rutabaga	Teas-Green, Black	
Butternut	Shallots	Water (plain and fortified)	
Cabbage (all types)	Spaghetti &Acorn	Yerba Matte	
Carrot	squash		
Cauliflower	Spinach		
Celery	Sweet Potato, Yams		
Chive	Swiss Chard		
Collards	Tomato (incl whole		
Corn	plum, canned)		
Cucumber	Turnip		
Eggplant	Watercress		
Endive	Yeast (Baker=s,		
Kale	Brewer=s)		
Kohlrabi	Yellow Squash		
Leeks	Zucchini		
Nuts, Seeds, & Spices-			
Agar Agar	Celery Seed	Ginger	(from grinder
Allspice	Chestnut	Hazelnut	Peppermint
Almond	Chili Pepper,	Horseradish	Pine Nuts
Anise seed	Cinnamon	Kelp	Pistachio
Basil	Cloves	Macadamia Nuts	Poppy Seed
Bay Leaf	Cocoa, Chocolate	Mace, Nutmeg	Pumpkin Seeds
Black/White Pepper	Coriander	Marjoram	Rosemary
Brazil Nut	Cumin	Mustardseed/powder	Sage
Caraway	Dill,	Oregano	Salt, Sea, coarse
Cardamom	Dulse	Papitas,	Sesame Seed
Carob chips &	English Walnut,	Paprika	Spearmint,
powder	Black Walnut	Parsley	Squash Seed
(unsweetened)	Filbert	Peanut	Sunflower Seed
Carrageen	Flaxseed	Pecans	Tarragon
Cashew	Garlic	Pepper, white,black	Thyme
Cayenne Powder			Turmeric

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Kids in the Kitchen

Have your kids ever said, “Sure, I’ll make dinner tonight.” You applaud their enthusiasm and effort, but just can’t seem to swallow the last bite of the one and only entrée, *macaroni and cheese sprinkled with corn chips!* Although you definitely don’t want to discourage your kids from cooking in the kitchen, some type of cuisine guidance may be necessary.

As parent, you are their role model and primary teacher. Not only do you buy the groceries but you also want to help them make healthy choices for a balanced meal. KidsHealth organization (www.kidshealth.org), Nemour Foundation, offers your first steps toward creating meal time habits that can lead to a lifetime of healthy choices.

- **Have regular family meals.**
- **Serve a variety of healthy foods and snacks.**
- **Be a role model by eating healthy yourself.**
- **Avoid battles over food.**
- **Involve kids in the process.**

We all know your child or teen will probably not suddenly want a salad over his favorite french-fries. Yet, when you start them young eating healthy and watching you eat healthy, the chances are they may more likely continue making healthier choices.

There are some basic tips for each step that give you a better chance that your children will continue making healthier choices:

➤ **Family Meals**—Family meals are a comforting ritual for both parents and kids. Kids who take part in regular family meals are also—

More likely to eat fruits, vegetables, and grains

Less likely to snack on unhealthy foods

Less likely to smoke, use marijuana, or drink alcohol

In addition, family meals give you the opportunity to try out new foods and find out which foods they do and don't like (which is NOT necessarily the primary determinant for planning meals. Otherwise, you will probably get macaroni and cheese daily!).

Teens may not be too excited about family meals. Most would rather be with their friends and feel more independent, even with what they eat. Yet, according to KidsHealth “. . . teens still want their parents' advice and counsel, so use mealtime as a chance to reconnect.” Here are some teen tips to make meal time together more fun:

Allow your teen to invite a friend to dinner.

Involve your teen in meal planning and preparation.

Keep mealtime calm and congenial - no lectures or arguing.

- **Serving a variety of healthy foods & snacks** may not be on the top of the list for your kids. However, if you pay the bills and want to help them grow healthy bodies and minds, insure they have lots of good choices.
- **Be a role model by eating healthy yourself.** Children are very smart and watch what you do even more than what you say. So eat healthy and show that you love it; and maybe the kids will actually love it too as an adult. One can always hope. Just keep doing the right thing. You will be glad you did.
- **Avoid battles over food** should be the daily mantra for every family at the dinner table. If meal time becomes a time for a free-for-all argument, you can pretty much guarantee the kids will grow up avoiding whatever you put on the table! So make it fun and congenial for all, please.
- **Involve kids in the process.** Most young children, in particular, love to be right there where you are in the kitchen. Let them know they are welcomed, but safe at the same time. When your child is at an appropriate age, give them the shopping list and go with them to select the foods and prepare the meal; and shop for their packable lunch. At the store, help your child check out the food labels to begin understanding nutritional values. In the kitchen, “select age-appropriate tasks so your child can play a part without getting injured or feeling overwhelmed. And at the end of the meal, don't forget to praise the chef. “ (KidsHealth)

Although these routines may not be easy as you try to juggle your busy schedule, the benefits far outweigh the initial extra effort. Unfortunately, it's just too easy to grab fast food. Try all this on a weekend to ease your family into these routines.

Young kids will eat most anything that is available at home after school. So, stock up daily on healthy snacks and foods ready to eat—whole fruits and vegetables (aiming for the goal of 5 servings a day), yogurt, peanut butter and celery, whole-grain crackers and cheese. KidsHealth recommends these basic meal serving tips:

- Lean meats and other good sources of protein, such as eggs, legumes, and nuts
- Whole-grain breads and cereals so your child gets more fiber
- Limit fat intake by avoiding deep-fried foods and choosing healthier cooking methods, such as broiling, grilling, roasting, and steaming
- Limit fast food and other low-nutrient snacks, such as chips and candy (don't completely ban favorite snacks; make them "once-in-a-while" foods
- Limit sugary drinks, such as soda and fruit-flavored drinks. Serve water and milk instead (I personally prefer avoiding any sugar-laden sodas)

This weekend, take the opportunity to go grocery shopping with your kids and plan your weekend meals together. If age appropriate, have your child plan and make one meal himself, with you as his “cook’s assistant.” Have fun going through your healthy cookbooks with them. Have your child check out the KidsHealth website for healthy recipes to choose. Turn some music on both you and your child enjoy; and groove along with your junior chef!

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The Secret Lunch Trade off or Trash it!

Picture two kids running out the door to catch the school bus. They grab the lunch you so carefully made for them with all the fantastically healthy ingredients neatly wrapped for safe keeping until lunch time. But what you don't know until years later, they either trade it off for someone else's jelly sandwich. They may even trash it and buy a burrito with a coke in the school cafeteria line or nearby taco stand.

If this sounds familiar, join the million plus parents of our nation's school age children. Some parents just hand them lunch money for the kids to do whatever they want or assume their school cafeteria is going to supply reasonably healthy meals. For the average school, one only has to visit on any particular day to see what their kids have for choices.

During the infant and toddler years you may be able to control what they eat—until their eighth birthday (even sooner maybe)! Then the food fights begin in all earnest. From then on, the food of preference more likely will be whatever their friend's parents fix! Certainly not what is served at home!

Are the descriptive words you hear at meal time sound something like "Yuck", or "Oh, Mom, not this again!" When will all your effort and care be appreciated? Well, the possibility is never; but it always feels better to be ever

hopeful. Whether Mom and/or Dad do the meal planning and cooking, we all know we should provide the healthiest, nutritional meals possible throughout their growing years (as well as for ourselves). But how would you like to make it much more fun and appetizing for young and old alike?

Yes, it is possible. Here are some beginning tips for getting your family to love meal time and, at the same, keep it healthy for all.

- Whatever you do, make it fun and enjoyable. When you walk in the door of your home, give yourself an attitude break from the hectic day. Put some music on, move to the mood, and get out the great food for the evening meal to enjoy!
- Make it a family activity together; share the meal planning, preparation, cooking, serving. Trade off who's the official cook for the day. If you have children, give them the opportunity and responsibility to prepare at least one meal/week for the family (with appropriate assistance if necessary).
- Decide how you want to eat healthy. Take into account any specific healthcare needs requiring certain dietary regimens. Do some homework—talk with your physician/nutritionist, go online, buy healthy eating cookbooks, take cooking classes together.
- Put together a two week menu featuring your family's favorite dishes and some new ones to try together. Try a half-day Saturday fixing meals for the week and freeze them.
- Go grocery shopping together—but try not to go when you are hungry!

- At least once/week, decorate the table and dining area that says, "Welcome", to family and friends. Something as simple as colorful napkins, table cloth, a centerpiece that makes a statement with the meal, and little favors that say, "I love you". Music that fits the menu is singularly fun. Do picnics on the patio or backyard.
- Take a break...eat out about one meal/week.

You may wonder, "Why just one meal/week in today's fast paced world?" I admit that with two working parents being the norm today, everyone seems to be eating out at least one meal per day if not two. One meal is also typically done on the run—and is definitely no fun! How many meals you believe your budget and schedule can handle is in your court to decide. Just keep in mind the dollars, time, nutrition, and enjoyment you may be missing with more meals from and at home.

If all we understand meals to be is food to strengthen our bodies and satisfy our appetites, we lose out on the deeper and richer purposes of mealtime. Whether at home or at a restaurant, mealtime should not only be fun but build relationships. Food should never be used as a tool of reward or punishment. Such behavior distorts and hinders the love and simplicity of heart that food and mealtime provides in building relationships.

Meals should always be conducive to love, quietness/rest, and gladness of heart . . . not strife and conflict. Try never to be angry when eating. It not only alienates relationships, ruins the appetite and digestion, but directly affects your health and well-being. If anger or frustration is a chronic behavior, get help to

resolve the underlying reasons. You will never regret it. Food and meals together will then be a cherished daily event whether dining alone or with family and friends. Next issue will cover some resources to help you enjoy meal time more at home, your local restaurant, and available cooking classes.

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