

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Meals . . . “Food for Thought” Tips, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 2, 2013)

What are your mealtimes like? If a core value to you is finding ways to reverse your fast pace and focus on the value of seizing every opportunity to build strength within your family, then this article may offer some “food for thought” tips as you consider ways to support this core value.

- **Choosing meals for the slow and fast lane of life.** How do you create mealtimes for the slow and fast lane of life? Whether you have a slower paced life, lucky you!, or live in the fast lane like most of us, staying healthy and happy has everything to do with what we eat and drink and how we experience mealtime. Start to chart your routine meals using the form, Choosing Meal for the slow & fast lane of life (<http://celebratingyourjourney.com/CYJ-ChoosingMealsForSlowFastLaneOfLife.pdf>). You can access the entire Meals section in my lifeskills book, *Celebrating Your Journey*, available at most all online booksellers. Then review how you fair as you move through this lifeskill section.
- **Whatever you do, make it fun, enjoyable, and appetizing.** 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!

- **Whether at home or at a restaurant, mealtime should not only be fun but build relationships.** Meals should always be conducive to love, quietness/rest, and gladness of heart . . . not strife and conflict. Whether at home or at a restaurant, start making mealtime a cherished daily event that is not only fun but build relationships. Be sure to serve up with every meal heaping cups of love, loyalty, forgiveness, friendship, hope, tenderness, a barrel of laughter and quarts of faith.
- **Try never to be angry when eating.** It not only alienates relationships, ruins the appetite and digestion, but directly affects your health and wellbeing. 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.
- **Food should not be used as a tool of reward or punishment for ourselves or our family.** Otherwise, such behavior distorts and hinders unconditional love and the simplicity of heart that food and mealtime should play in building relationships. Dysfunctional patterns can develop and be symptomatic of deeper issues in one's life. If so, always seek help.

The next set of “food for thought” tips will be served up in the next article. I leave you with Johnny Carson’s (1925-2005) one-liner, “If it weren't for Philo T. Farnsworth, inventor of television, we'd still be eating frozen radio dinners.”

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welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart. . .

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Meals . . . “Food for Thought” Tips, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 9, 2013)

Remember the question I posed to you . . . What are your mealtimes like?

Here is the next set of “food for thought” tips served up for your consideration.

- **Share a meal with some friends or welcomed stranger once/month.**

There's nothing like lovin from the oven when friends come to call! And always keep the welcome mat always handy for that welcomed stranger. If you have kids, don't forget to have their friends over too for some food and fun.

- **Choosing Meal Gathering Times and Places.** Most of the time we think of three meals per day as the routine—at home, away from home, and while traveling. For some, health conditions require a different arrangement. You will have to decide if that works for you. Yet, for most of us we follow three squares a day with snacks in between. The usual time for meals can be from 7-10am for breakfast, noon-2pm for lunch, and 5-8pm for dinner/supper. For those who arrive home later at night, supper ends up being around 9pm or so. This late time is not recommended by most physicians and nutritionists. The digestive tract needs a break prior to bedtime. The usual recommendation is a small healthy snack before 8:30pm and nothing after that time. By all means, check with your physician on what works best for you.

- **Schedule regular family meals.** Make it a family activity together; share the meal planning, preparation, cooking, serving. It will take a disciplined effort that yields great rewards. Always keep as a priority that perfection is not the goal but supportive communication and laughter together is the goal. If you are single or living alone, chose a meal to share with a relative or friend at least once/week to begin with.
- **Become a role model by eating healthy yourself.** Children are very smart and watch what you do more than what you say. This can be great accountability for you as well. We can model buying and eating foods that are great in flavor, build energy and stamina—NOT fat! 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.
- **Avoid battles over food and serious topics of the day.** Avoid battles over food should be the daily mantra for every family at the dinner table. If you allow mealtime to become a time for a free-for-all argument, you can pretty much guarantee the kids will grow up finding any way to avoid mealtime and reject the food prepared. Use this time for healthy interaction and mutual encouragement.
- **Who's the cook? Any takers?** Trade off who's the official cook for the day. Don't let gender limit you. Women are not the only cooks in the kitchen. Although one may have more enthusiasm and skill than the other for cooking,

all should participate together and learn from each other. Often times (for the less motivated), new enthusiasm and skill grows on you.

- **Involve kids in the process.** Most young children, in particular, love to be right there where we are in the kitchen. 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 Kids Health website (www.kidshealth.com) for healthy recipes to choose to prepare once a week. We all know your child or teen will probably not suddenly want a salad over his favorite french-fries. When you start your children young preparing and eating healthy foods, and watching you eat healthy, the chances are they will more likely continue making healthier choices. Experts indicate that 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
- **Use basic, healthier food preparation methods.** As you keep the basic staples available in your pantry, refrigerator, freezer, you will rarely have to run to the store for something you are missing. That means you have done some menu planning too for the week or month. This also depends on how you shop—by the day, week, month. With the right budget, you can save a lot of money by buying in bulk at stores like Costco or Sam's Club. However, you will need the room in your budget and for storing the extra. As these basic

staples are always handy, it will make meal preparation easy on your time, health, and budget. Also, try to buy local and farmers markets when possible.

The most basic food prep considerations are:

- **Use only fresh or well preserved food products.**
- **Learn to use healthier cooking methods—broiling, grilling, roasting, steaming.**
- **Keep all food prep surfaces free from bacteria** as much as possible. Always use a designated cutting board for meat only; all other foods are on separate surfaces.
- **Try not to use chlorinated water for prep, cooking, baking.** This water often creates an undesirable flavor on the food. Use filtered or spring water. With a possible exception, some food experts suggest using very diluted Clorox or soapy water to sanitize certain foods to reduce the risk of Salmonella or E.Coli contamination; then rinse with fresh running water. Experts also recommend peeling raw fruits and vegetables if possible.
- **Do not overcook your food.** Most essential nutrients will be lost. Learn how to coat and sear the surface of meat as you begin cooking to hold in flavor, juices, and nutrients.
- **Learn what foods go well with each other** and create menus to enhance flavor and nutrient value.
- **Use lots of fresh and dried herbs and spices.** This will help you reduce the risk of overdoing the amount of salt and pepper you use.

- **Include in your menu raw and very lightly steamed fruits and vegetables** in the form of salads, purees, and toppings to increase your digestive enzyme production and nutrient value. Prepare foods with minimal processing as possible and still be healthy and safe to consume. Animal protein should be cooked, that's for sure.

These are just a few of the “Food for Thought” tips and resources available in my lifeskills book, *Celebrating Your Journey, Lifeskills in Synergy* (Lifeskill Section 8, Meals), available at most all online booksellers. Other tips include serving a variety of health foods & snacks, planning your menus, going grocery shopping together, setting up your pantry, kitchen/dining layout, kitchen gadgets galore, and more.

The next article will be on mealtime surroundings that say “Welcome.”

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Mealtime Surroundings that say "Welcome"

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 16, 2013)

For most of us we never seem to have a big enough kitchen, dining room area, or even house. Yet, at least for the moment, our budget won't allow for a remodel or a move. So, how do you create an atmosphere that says "welcome" with what you have right now?

It is possible to be creative even in a small space you can enjoy until that moment comes when your budget says you can make the move. You will be surprised how much space you may actually have when well organized. If you aren't the organizational type, consider hiring a coach to help make your kitchen, dining area, home work better for you. Call up a friend or family member that has the talent you need. But make sure you appreciate their efforts as they respect your preferences. Also, be aware projects like this can challenge a relationship. So, keep it friendly, by all means.

Here are a few basic tips to consider:

1. **On a day you are refreshed and energetic, take inventory of your kitchen/dining area layout.** Is it user friendly, inviting for family and guests? Begin to assess how you can make it more inviting without a total makeover costing lots of dollars . Is it cluttered? A little too tight around the edges? Take

a picture of the area. Then go online to see different furniture layout possibilities with the same space dimensions. Better Homes & Garden has a free link to “Design a Room Layout” at <http://www.bhg.com>. Another is www.homedit.com. These are just two of many online resources. If you can’t find something online, take out some paper you can draw to scale your space. Cut out furniture pieces and start playing with placement. Whether online or with cutouts, take into account surrounding space you might be able to use differently to remove the clutter and create a more welcoming, relaxed space.

2. **Make sure your kitchen and dining furniture is suitable for the space you have.** If your furniture is a little too big, think about ways to reduce its size, if possible...such as one less chair, one less leaf in the table, or placing the table in a different position. If you are handy at furniture building tools, consider ways to recreate the table to fit. Also, if your budget has some extra cash sitting around, hunt at discount and secondhand places for replacing just the chairs, table, or the whole set. Consider a barter exchange arrangement with the store or your friend.
3. **Check out your storage areas for food items.** If you have a garage and don’t have a pantry and cabinet space is small, consider using a portion for a storage system. Remember, though, in Texas we have some hot summers. Garages are rarely air conditioned and retain heat. No matter how small or large your kitchen area may be, you can organize it to accommodate adequate storage for those basic nonperishable and perishable items. For the

nonperishable's, storage can take place in the utility room, pantry, or garage. If not, choose a kitchen cabinet or two for organizing and storing all the basic staples. Depending on the size of your refrigerator/freezer, perishable can be organized by food category (protein, vegetables, fruits, carbo). Again, check out Better Homes & Garden online for their "organizing your pantry by zones." You will then see what food you have, what you need to restock, and where the groceries belong much more easily. You can also go on Youtube.com, and type "organize pantry." Loads of videos will come up giving you all kinds of ideas.

4. **Lighten and brighten the kitchen/dining area.** Proper lighting and placement can greatly enhance the color, ambience, and function of the area. Placement and lighting type depends on the task in that area, such as under cabinet lighting, accent (or decorative), and ambient (or overall) lighting within the space. Again, check Better Homes & Garden link to get ideas that will improve your lighting that addresses every purpose, from food preparation, safety, dining pleasure, to complementary color enhancement. And be sure to pick lighting that is energy efficient and easy on the eyes.
5. **Get Creative.** At least once/month, 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". Many retail store carry plates that have written affirmations or create your own. Have fun using the plate to celebrate

the small and big victories of family members at mealtime. Music that fits the menu is singularly fun. Do picnics on the patio or backyard.

What other ideas do you come up with? Ask your family, your kids to share ideas and help with the process. Make it fun for all. Next article will cover some of the traditional and latest technological gadgets for your kitchen and dining experience.

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Mealtime Kitchen Gadgetry

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 23, 2013)

Have you noticed how eye-shocking color is in and subtle is out lately not only with clothes but also with kitchen ware and gadgets? Hot pink, fire-engine red, bright blue, over-the-top orange, you name it.

From cookware, cutlery, to coffeemakers, these eye-popping colors show up. Color is a wonderful thing. It brightens our morning and soothes our evening. Which colors do you want for your kitchen gadgets? I lean toward sunshine yellow and lush green. Yet, there is a hitch do my choice. When I look over my everyday dishes and cookware, those are the only colors missing. Maybe I need the help from a style coordinator.

No matter what you currently have in your cabinets and drawers in the way of colors, trying to balance the *tools of the trade* with aesthetics can get expensive. And who wants to do a complete re-do. I would, of course, if the budget and hubby would only agree!

So back to reality and maybe decide to take it one step at a time...say with one or two gadgets that are needed. Keep in mind that the choice of kitchen gadgets depend heavily on your own lifestyle cuisine, particular if you are one to routinely eat loads of fresh fruits and vegetables, not just meat and potatoes fair.

From microwave to indoor/outdoor gourmet cuisine, the choices go on and on. No matter how much fun you think you may have with the latest and greatest, ask yourself, “Do I really need it or can I use what I already have and still have fun?”

Frequently, the most simple kitchen tools do a fine job grating, slicing, chopping, grilling, baking. In Tosca Reno’s blog, January 8, 2013 (author of *Your Best Body Now* and the *Eat-Clean Diet*® series), she and Kim Kash (a writer, editor by trade, and enthusiastic home cook), offer five top kitchen gadgets Kash can’t do without for fun, healthy eating, and dining.

Kash’s first one is an Electric Citrus Juicer. “Every morning, I transform a whole grapefruit to a glass of fresh juice in 3 minutes flat. I slice a pink grapefruit in half, and juice it using an inexpensive electric juicer. . . It’s a little more effort to juice a grapefruit than it is to pour a glass from a carton, but not a lot. The big difference is in the flavor . . . and in the health benefits. . .”

The second gadget is an Immersion Blender. “I love thick, creamy vegetable soups. The consistency is decadent, but the ingredients couldn’t be healthier in most cases . . . The immersion blender also gives me more control over the consistency of the soup than a traditional blender, as well. If I want to leave a bit of chunkiness to the vegetables, I find that the immersion blender works better than the pulse function on my regular blender.”

The third gadget is an extra Coffee Grinder. “I like to spice food generously, as well-spiced food needs less fat and salt to taste good. Freshly ground spice tastes like itself. . . It’s easy to grind whole spices in small quantities

as you need them, if you have a spare grinder. Don't use your actual coffee grinder, unless you want your food to taste a bit like coffee, and your coffee to taste a bit like coriander?"

Then comes the classic good quality Garlic Press. "Garlic is a superbly healthy and versatile ingredient, and I include it in almost everything I cook. Some people object to big, intense slivers of garlic in their food, but are okay with the flavor as long as the garlic has been thoroughly pulverized and incorporated into the dish. That's where a great garlic press comes in. You probably have a garlic press somewhere in the utensil drawer, but a bad press is worse than none at all. When shopping for a garlic press, look for one that's heavy — not one of those lightweight aluminum ones. It should have a comfortable handle, preferably padded in rubber. Also look for a set of teeth on the reverse side that can be pushed through the little holes of the press to help clean them out. . ."

The fifth "can't do without" gadget for Kash is a good-quality Salad Spinner. "I am actually not a huge fan of green salads. Sure, I eat them because they're healthy. However, the way I prefer to shoehorn salad into my everyday eating is to serve nearly everything on a bed of greens. Sneaky, right? . . . When it's time to put together a salad or a bed of greens for a meal, I just haul the spinner out of the fridge, give the greens a fresh rinse, and spin them dry. I pull out as much or little as I want, then stick the spinner back in the fridge for next time. (If you do this, make sure you drain and dry the spinner's bowl each time so that the basket of greens isn't sitting in a puddle of water.) Get a spinner with some weight to it — the lightweight ones break easily. . ."

I have all five and love to use them. You get into a routine with each use. And the flavors are unbeatable along with healthier! It actually keeps things simple when cooking and cleaning up. Who wants to wash layers of gadget parts anyway. And with the simpler nonelectric gadgets, you actually use your muscles more frequently! And that's a good thing!

If you have a particular Meals topic request, send my way for the next article. After eight years writing my byline and still counting, I can always use a little help from my readers! See you next time.

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Meals . . . World of Herb/Spice Flavors

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Over the past month, my husband, John, has been taking a course called “The Everyday Gourmet, Rediscovering the Lost Art of Cooking” by Chef Bill Briwa (source: The Great Courses). The amazing results have been how incredibly delicious herbs and spices make any dish, when used in just the right combination. Not only are they great for the palate but also our health.

One of the complementary books he bought was *The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices, & Flavorings*. The amazing contribution from across the world opens up all kinds of cuisine possibilities. These fragrant herbs were first cultivated thousands of years ago and used with whatever foodstuffs were available through the seasons. History books document very early knowledge of herb cultivation and use in many continents and cultures. From Egypt, China, India, Arabia, Persia, and Greece, the use of herbs remains a perpetual tradition.

With specific combinations of herbs, spices, and flavorings, these mixtures have been part of the native foodstuffs across nations. These are just a few examples:

- India = highly aromatic such as curry, cumin, turmeric
- Thailand = Lemongrass, Kaffir lime, fresh Cilantro leaves

- China = five-spice powder blends in soy sauce or black bean sauce, gingerroot, garlic
- Indonesia = sweet & sour; lemongrass, tamarind, Kaffir lime, chilies, combined with dried shrimp
- Mediterranean = thyme, sage, bay, oregano, rosemary.
- Mexico = Chilies, thyme
- Italy = Dill, ginger, coriander, nutmeg
- Africa = Mint, saffron, cilantro, cloves, cinnamon

These are just a few culinary influences. Then add vegetable and fruit flavorings from limes, onions, to chocolate...and extracts, essences and sweeteners too many to even try to list. Add to how herbs and spices are enhanced by sauces, preserves, and condiments. Then think about all the variety of herb teas and spiced drinks we can concoct today.

I hope I have enticed you to look into this wonderful world of herbs and spices, and their fascinating historical roots. I leave you with one sauce that will take any leftovers and make it taste like you just ate at a five-star restaurant. This sauce come from Chef's Briwa's *The Everyday Gourmet*. Be sure to give it a try on any stir fry. Even drop it on your dinner salad instead of the standard Italian or ranch dressing.

Cilantro-Lime Sauce (from Vietnamese Noodle Salad, pg. 76) = Equal parts of minced garlic, minced ginger, lime juice, sugar, soy sauce, water, chopped cilantro, chopped peanuts; and for those who want to "kick it up a notch," minced Thai bird chilies. But be careful, there is lots of fire in it. If you

want to go a little lighter, choose a less stinging chili. Just a pinch or two should do. But the sauce is fantastic even without the chili addition. Bon appétit!

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