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SIMPLE YET SATISFYING: PLANNING HEALTHY, YUMMY KIDS' MEALS

Preparing healthy and delicious meals is one of the important jobs of every parent. You have to make sure that your kids eat well-balanced meals and snacks every day so that they get all the nutrients they need. Giving well-planned meals to your kids will also help greatly with their proper growth and development.

Menu Planning

According to an expert nutrition advisor, **planning a weekly menu** is usually an economic and efficient way of ensuring that your little ones will receive a nutritionally balanced diet every day. It also helps make budgeting, food shopping and preparing meals easier and faster as well.

Meal planning doesn't have to be a complicated and time-consuming task. As a mom, you can be sure that you will be serving well-balanced and delectable meals and snacks by following the tips and techniques below:

- **Determine how many meals you want to plan**

If you're a mom and new to weekly menu planning, keep in mind that it is best to take things slowly. This means that you don't have to immediately plan three meals for seven days; you can start small.

Begin by planning meals for breakfast during school days and dinner every night. To make good decisions regarding the dishes you will serve, **consider using your meal plan to fix or improve your kids' eating habits**. For instance, if you want your kids to eat a nutrient-packed and filling breakfast so that they'll feel energized when they go to school, you have to come up with dishes packed with vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients such as protein and good fat.

Examples of easy to make and healthy meals you can serve during breakfast for your toddler and older kids include:

- Whole grain toast with cream cheese and berries
- Hard-boiled eggs with whole grain crackers or toast
- Whole grain cereal with low-fat milk and fresh fruits

Don't forget to give your kids a glass of Similac 3 to give them a variety of nutrients which they will need to take on all of the day's activities.

Once you get the hang of menu planning, you can plan for all three meals and snacks so that you can save more time and money from food shopping and the whole prep process.

- **Make menu planning a family activity**

If your kids are involved in the menu planning process, they will be more likely to eat what is prepared. As such, **ask your children and other family members what foods or dishes they would like to eat during the week.** In addition, you will find it easier to get help with the meal preparation and clean-up process if you consider their food preferences.

- **Write down your menu plan**

You can **use a blank calendar or a piece of paper to write down your menu**. You can also write your shopping list on the same piece of paper to make sure that you'll get everything you need for next week's menu. When you're not using the menu plan, post it on the refrigerator for everyone to see so that they can have something to look forward to for the next mealtime.

You can also **use an app or note the meals on the calendar on your smartphone or tablet**. You'll also have an easier time searching the Internet for recipes, prep, and cooking tips and with sharing them with the other family members.

- **Choose your recipes**

Once you've decided (and everyone has agreed) which dishes you'll serve, look for the best recipes to use. Write these recipes on your meal plan or save the webpage or video on your phone.

Select recipes that are easy to follow and will allow you to incorporate different fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious ingredients. Also, choose ones that will allow you to prep ingredients once and use twice. For instance, you can boil cauliflowers and use some for a puree to accompany a meat dish and the rest for next day's stew.

- **Make each meal fun for kids**

Even if you follow a tried and tested healthy and delicious recipe, don't forget to **add or do something special to make the dish or snack irresistible to kids**. For instance, if you're serving sandwiches for lunch, place the ingredients in separate containers and let kids assemble this simple meal.

Kids love stacking and rolling up their food into fun treats. Don't forget to include some veggies and healthy condiments so that they'll have a complete, nutritious, and yummy simple meal.

When serving snacks, **use cookie cutters to carve fruits or mini-sandwiches** into different shapes such as stars, triangles, circles or squares. You can also try other types or shapes of pasta so that your kids will get curious about them and will be excited to try them.

Lastly, **expose your children to at least one new flavor or food each week**. This can be an item they've never eaten before or one they haven't had in quite a long time.

- **Eat meals together as a family whenever possible**

Finally, make sure everyone enjoys the dishes you plan and serve by setting specific meal times every day. At the very least, everyone should be at the table during dinner.

Studies show that children who eat meals with their parents have healthier eating habits than those who don't. In addition, families who eat together at home are more likely to consume less fast food and more fruits and vegetables. Family-shared mealtimes are also great opportunities for everyone to relax and bond together.

By planning meals for your family, you encourage healthy eating. You also make sure that your kids enjoy tasty and filling meals and snacks devoid of unhealthy and artificial ingredients and additives.