

Healthy Connections: Family Meals in a Snap

K-STATE
Research and Extension
Family and Consumer Sciences

Leader's Guide

2026 Annual Lesson Series

Introduction:

In today's fast-paced world, families often struggle to find the time to prepare and consume nutritious home-cooked meals. Busy schedules, work commitments, and after-school activities can result in families frequently utilizing convenience foods or take-out for meals. Research indicates that family meals consumed away from the home are higher in calories, sugar, and fat. In addition, adolescents who consume family meals at home have decreased rates of depression, disordered eating patterns, and drug and alcohol use.

Educating and supporting families to increase the frequency of family meals prepared at home can be beneficial to not only the health outcomes of family members, but also the emotional, behavioral, and financial wellbeing of the family.

Educational Goals and Objectives

As a result of participating in this educational program, the learner will be able to:

- State at least two benefits of preparing and consuming family meals at home.
- Describe how to repurpose or reuse leftovers to save money and reduce food waste.
- Know how to plan, prepare, and consume healthy meals.

- State and incorporate food safety standards into meal preparation.

Materials Needed

- Leader's Guide
- Participant Fact Sheet (MF3695), one copy per participant
- Evaluation, one copy per participant
- PowerPoint
- Computer
- Projector, projector screen, and extension cord

Optional Materials: food thermometer, examples of freezer storage bags/containers, recipes, ingredients, and supplies for a cooking demonstration (including food safety gloves); basic cooking tools such as dry/liquid measuring cups, measuring spoons, cutting board, knives, mixing bowls, etc.

Intended Audiences:

Appropriate groups could include but are not limited to: Adult groups of all ages, Family and Community Education (FCE) groups, other community organizations, childcare center family enrichment presentations, and FCS lifespan or nutrition high school classes.

Before the Lesson:

Prepare by taking these steps:

1. Review the PowerPoint presentation, including the resources and talking points included in the notes section of the PowerPoint slides.
2. Review the *Healthy Connections: Family Meals in a Snap* Fact Sheet (MF3695) and Leader's Guide.
3. Consider how the program will be delivered to the identified audience. If the presentation location limits the use of the PowerPoint consider printing handouts or the PowerPoint for participant use.
4. If conducting a food demonstration, ensure you have all the ingredients and tools necessary.
5. Consider adjustments that may be needed to align with the nutritional needs, cultural preferences, or learning needs of the intended audience.
 - Plan for any visuals or hands-on activities that will be delivered with the program. (Food Thermometer – Reviewing how to accurately check the internal temperature when reheating leftovers.)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOFHUVNPnIU>
 - https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/using-a-digital-thermometer-for-food-products_MF3673
 - Proper Storage — Bring examples of freezer bags and containers that can help prolong food quality.
 - <https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/freeze-general-information/containers-for-freezing/>
6. K-State Research and Extension FCS Agent — Create a program activity in PEARS and attach the program evaluation. After attaching the evaluation to the program activity, copy the QR code and paste it onto the last slide of the PowerPoint presentation.

Leading the Lesson

Every class participant that attends the *Healthy Connections: Family Meals in a Snap* session will have varying levels of cooking and meal preparation confidence and experience. Participants will also have differing life circumstances that result in consuming meals outside of the home. As an educator, be

intentional about starting discussion early in the session to learn the participants' challenges, barriers, and comfort level in the kitchen. This may result in redirecting the conversation to address topics such as how to properly measure ingredients, how to wash, cut, and store fresh produce, or how to use a food thermometer. It is essential to meet participants where they are in their knowledge journey and to provide education and support to empower them to brainstorm solutions to overcome their challenges. This approach will support participants in implementing knowledge gained into behavior changes that can impact their family's emotional, financial, and physical health.

Discussion Prompts

- What are some challenges you face regarding eating meals at home?
- How do you think home-cooked meals compare to takeout or restaurant food in terms of nutrition, cost, and satisfaction?
- Do you currently plan meals for the week? What strategies have worked for you? What hasn't worked?
- How do you think cooking meals at home could benefit your family?
- How do you balance cooking with other daily responsibilities like work, school, or extracurricular activities?

Activity (optional)-Family Conversations

- **Objective:** Mealtime conversation can help improve communication skills, strengthen relationships, and enhance emotional well-being.
- Print off a copy of the Table Talk Cards for each participant or have one set to be utilized for session discussion.
 - **Table Talk Cards:** http://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/miscellaneous/m2265-Tabletalk_cards18_rev120518.pdf
- The Table Talk Cards can be utilized as an ice breaker at the beginning of the presentation or as an activity at the end for participants to practice in small groups reading and responding to the questions.
- Review with participants how they can utilize the cards during mealtime to strengthen and improve conversation with their family members.

Activity (optional) - Cooking Demonstration

Objective: To teach families how to cook healthy, affordable, and delicious meals at home, while incorporating food safety standards into cooking practices

Step 1: Choose a recipe from an extension resource that includes a nutrition fact label. Consider MyPlate when choosing recipes, to help participants gain experience choosing nutritionally balanced recipes.

- <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/recipe-category/one-pot-slow-cooker/>
- <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/recipe-category/freeze-well/>

Step 2: Have all ingredients, cooking materials (measuring cups, measuring spoons, cooking equipment, food thermometer, food safety gloves), and storage bags or containers available.

Step 3: Follow hand washing and food safety guidelines while either conducting the food demonstration or engaging participants in the recipe preparation.

Step 4: Show participants a recommended serving size of the recipe and provide them with a sample of the recipe to taste. Ask for feedback on the recipe and ask them to discuss what they would do differently at home if they were to prepare this recipe.

Activity (optional) – Meal Planning

Objective: Help participants learn how to plan meals efficiently by considering their schedule, available ingredients, sales, and family preferences.

Step 1: Meal Planning Activity Introduction

- Review the benefits of meal planning discussed in the presentation.
 - Ask participants how meal planning could benefit their families.
 - Ask participants, what do they need to think about when planning meals for the next week.
- Provide each participant with a copy of the following handouts:
 - How to Plan Meals - <https://iastate.app.box.com/s/wxfiazwyuvaqbp4anstk>
 - Family Favorite Recipes - <https://iastate.app.box.com/v/sses-recipes-category>

- 5 Day Meal Planning Worksheet
 - English - <https://iastate.app.box.com/s/nwecdndbm5ighioz3suu>
 - Spanish - <https://iastate.app.box.com/s/n1ew5bky44jwbxogsawr0ziqnmnx47j6>
- <https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2024-07/MyPlate-Create-A-Grocery-Game-Plan-Grocery-List.pdf>

Step 2: Encourage participants to use the *Family Favorite Recipes* and the *5 Day Meal Planning Worksheet* handouts to practice meal planning:

- Encourage participants to use the *Family Favorite Recipes* to write down meals and sides that their family regularly consumes. This completed handout will help with brainstorming during meal planning.
- Make notes of evening activities and obligations.
 - “An evening commitment could be a great opportunity to plan a slow cooker meal or schedule a leftover night to repurpose leftovers.”
- Make a list of items that are currently available in their pantry, freezer, or refrigerator.
- If local grocery stores have ads available, encourage participants to look at the ads to determine sale items for the week.

Step 3: Building a Menu

- Have participants choose a meal for each day, keeping in mind their schedule, ingredients on hand, and sales.
 - Encourage participants to start with one day at a time.
 - “Let’s start by picking a meal for each day. What are some quick and easy meals you can make on busy days? What do you enjoy eating as a family?”
 - “I am going to give you a few minutes to work on your calendar to plan meals for this week. When planning meals, think about what we discussed earlier regarding cooking items ahead to reduce time spent in the kitchen and repurposing leftovers.”

Step 4: Discussion, Sharing and Wrapping Up

- Encourage participants to share one or two menu ideas with the class.
- Explain that change is a gradual process and that even starting with one extra meal at home each week can strengthen family connections, promote healthier eating, and save money.

Evaluation

After the lesson, ask participants to complete the evaluation electronically or the paper version. The local Extension Office should manually enter paper evaluation responses into PEARS after the event.

Supplemental Handouts, Resources, and Recipes:

- <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes>
- <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/>
- <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu/recipes/>
- <https://www.myplate.gov/resources/print-materials>
- <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/resources/nutrition-education-materials/meal-planning-shopping-and-budgeting>
- [*Cooking 101 - Quick and Easy Menus, Recipes and Tips for Singles and Couples - Week 4: Grocery Shopping Made Easy \(FN1559\)*](#)

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Evaluation

Healthy Connections: Family Meals in a Snap

Please take a moment to respond to the questions below.

Date and location of presentation: _____

My county of residence: _____

Gender: Female Male Non-binary Prefer not to answer

Race: American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American
 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander White Prefer not to respond

Ethnicity: Hispanic/Latino Non Hispanic/Latino Prefer not to respond

Age: 18-29 years 30-59 years 60-75 years
 76+ years Prefer not to answer

1. Because of this program, I increased my knowledge of how to plan and prepare healthy meals at home.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Because of this program I intend to follow food safety recommendations on storing and reheating leftovers.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. Because of this program I increased my knowledge of the importance of family mealtimes.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Because of this program, I intend to increase the frequency of meals prepared and consumed at home.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Please list 2 things you learned from this program you intend to incorporate into your life.

6. Please share any additional comments or suggestions.