

The “Time to Cook” Dilemma!

I routinely hear our media espousing messages about having “no time to cook”. I had an “aha” moment last week when I realized I had been hearing these messages over and over in one form or another since I was a child. How many of you believe you have no time to prepare food? Or believe cooking isn’t a valuable way to spend your time? The food industry has spent billions of dollars embedding this message into the minds of us, the masses.

Unfortunately this message has been so well received that over 60 million adult Americans are obese. Fifteen percent of children and young adults are overweight. You probably already know that obesity leads to an array of chronic, debilitating diseases.

Could there be a connection?

Is having no time really the challenge? Or is it possible that it’s about priorities, the media messages, the lack of food preparing skills and the need for an increase in education about whole vital foods and how well they fuel your body.

Have we defined for ourselves what being healthy means?

If we continue to believe we have no time to prepare food we will continue to fuel an industry to produce processed convenience foods. That has the potential to increase our waistlines and the prevalence of chronic diseases.

I don’t know of a processed food that can give your body the same benefits whole, vital foods can. Vital foods are foods that come from the farmer to your kitchen with little or no change. Fresh whole (local or regional if possible) vegetables and fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and free range meats.

Let’s talk about what we can do!

We can choose to take back the kitchen and change our concepts around being too busy to cook. Spend some time reflecting on what your thoughts about food, cooking and health are, and how they have shaped your time management. Are they supporting yourself and your family to be in the best health?

Cooking is an art and a skill. We’ll focus on the skill. My husband says when people say they don’t like to cook he imagines they simply don’t know how. He could be right. How many Americans are skilled in the kitchen these days? How many pass on what they know to their children? Cooking and preparing food is similar to any other skill you have learned. It takes time, practice, information and motivation. The most important skill is learning how to use a knife. Healthier eating involves chopping lots of vegetables and once you hone that, the learning curve is short. Cooking can be fun, engaging and a time for you and your family to do something together. Choose to engage in new learning, new recipes and a new way to connect with your family.

How much time does it really take to shop, prepare and cook healthy meals? I kept track for a few days and I spend approximately 10 hours a week on preparing and shopping for food. The real question is what might you cut back on in order to prioritize cooking? It can be helpful to spend 2-3 days logging how you spend your time each day. You may be surprised at what you find. Take a few minutes to reflect on your priorities and how they show up in your daily schedule. Are there some things you are willing to shift or change to include more time in the kitchen?

Buy locally and regionally grown produce when they are available. When we buy local we are sustaining our local economy and at the same time get more nutrition from our food. Nutritional value of fruits and vegetables decreases over time. The longer it takes to get from a farm to your mouth the less nutritional value it has. Nature's General Store and Devore's Good Food Store are both locally owned and offer local and regionally grown produce on a regular basis. The Farmer's market is another great opportunity we have available from June to October.

What does it mean to fuel yourself rather than eating until you are full? When we begin to look at food as "vital nutrition" for our bodies it shifts our perspective. Our bodies need the vitamins, antioxidants, minerals, amino acids and fiber in whole foods. Fueling is looking at food as giving you energy, nourishment and pleasure. If health is a top value for you, choose to enhance it. There are many simple choices you can make to increase your intake of healthy foods.

Tips to begin changing your eating patterns:

1. Be realistic, start with small changes you can be successful with.
2. Spend some time evaluating the benefits of change and the benefits of staying the same. Have a family meeting to talk about everyone pitching in so that you can create healthier meals. Talk about health and its importance.
3. Add instead of subtract. Add one vegetable a day versus cutting out something else. Eventually as you add you will naturally eat less of the other foods.
4. Get educated about what is happening to our food supplies. Read "Fast Food Nation" "Diet for a Dead Planet" or "Food Politics". Read labels on all processed foods, know what you are eating.
5. With children, start with one bite of a new food; introduce it frequently in small amounts. Read and educate yourself on portion sizes, teach your children.
6. Really savor your food. When you choose a treat take the time to really notice it. You'll eat less, appreciate more and feel better.
7. You will eat what is available, stock healthy! Buy less packaged snack foods; instead have fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts and seeds, vegetables with dip and whole grain bread available for snacks.
8. As you decrease sugar in your diet notice any changes in your moods or the moods of your children.
9. Plan meals and shop with a list. Many times I cook one night and eat leftovers and a big salad the next.
10. Trust your body; begin to listen to how it feels after you eat. Notice what foods feel best.

Another tool to support you is my blog which is an online journal. I write about health, wellness and balance. Starting in January, I will be publishing two healthy recipes a month. Log onto: <http://intobalancecoaching.wordpress.com/>
Log onto <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition/index.htm> This CDC website has lots of information about health, wellness and nutrition.

"Let's choose to fuel the next generation with healthy foods and point them in the direction of lifelong wellness."

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