

Cooking Corner

Bring The Family Back To The Dinner Table With Five Quick Tips

(NAPS)—With summer in the rear-view mirror, school back in session and days getting shorter, it's the perfect time to rethink your dinner routine.

One problem: The only routine you can stick to is not having one. Fortunately, you don't need to commit to a specific dinner routine to enjoy meals with the family after a long day.

Nigel Palmer, lead research and development chef for Home Chef, says that for advance planners and last-minute home cooks alike, there are plenty of ways to get a quick meal on the table and enjoy dinner with the family on busy days.

"People think that chefs cook elaborate meals for dinner," Palmer says. "The truth is, by the time my wife and I pick up our daughter, commute home and help with homework, we're looking for something convenient, quick and delicious—we're not spending hours at the stove."

Meal Kits That Anyone Can Cook

Palmer is not alone. According to a recent Food Genius survey, eight out of 10 people don't know what they'll fix for dinner by 4 p.m. that day.

Enter Home Chef, a meal kit company that delivers over 3.5 million meals per month online at homechef.com and in select grocery stores.

"Our meal kits are designed to be simple enough for anyone to prepare and delicious enough for anyone to love," says Palmer. "Every recipe includes fresh, pre-portioned ingredients in exactly the quantity you need, which helps to minimize food waste."

Home Chef offers a variety of meal kits with different levels of preparation and cooking times, including Oven Ready recipes, served in an oven-safe tin for easy clean up, and a Heat & Eat line that can be warmed in under five minutes.

Weekly rotating menus offer up to 18 recipes, including Pine Nut and Goat Cheese-Crusted Chicken, Steak with Garlic Herb Butter, Basil Pesto Salmon, Apricot Almond Pork Tenderloin and Coconut-Crusted Tofu Tacos.

"Our customers love the variety of meals that we offer," says Palmer. "We also allow our customers to customize their recipes by swapping or doubling their protein, to create a meal that is uniquely their own."

Convenient for anyone who wants to have a home-cooked meal without



Meal kits can be a terrific way to get nutritious family dinners on the table in no time.

spending hours in the kitchen, Home Chef is available to order online up to five weeks' in advance, or at Kroger grocery stores nationwide.

Hit The Salad Bar

Not only are the salad bars in your local grocery store a great place to build a delicious dinner salad, but they are also a great resource to shop for ingredients that will shave preparation time off your favorite recipes.

Palmer suggests sourcing pre-chopped and pre-washed vegetables to add a nutritious boost to your dinner.

- Leafy greens like spinach or kale work well in baked pasta dishes, casseroles or omelets.
- Chopped vegetables including zucchini, carrots, broccoli or cabbage are delicious in speedy stir-fries, side dishes or soups.
- Grilled chicken, beans and cheeses are great to throw into salads for an extra serving of proteins.

Another idea, says Palmer, is to let your kids create their own DIY quesadillas. Pick up a package of whole-grain tortillas and let everyone in the family pick their cheese, chicken, beans and veggies from the salad bar.

"It's a fun way to get the kids involved with cooking and trying new cuisines," he adds.

Cheese, Please

A great place to explore flavors from around the world is the cheese counter. Break up the monotony of the same old meals by creating delicious cheese boards for dinner.

"Constructing a 'cheese for dinner' board is all about balance and variety," says Lauren Toth, training and curriculum manager for Murray's Cheese. "Aim to have a range of styles, flavors, textures and even colors represented on the board."

Toth recommends choosing between three and five cheeses as the basis of your cheese board and include a mix of different textures and milk types to keep things interesting.

"If you're dealing with picky eaters, include at least two familiar, easygoing cheeses like block cheddars, Monterey Jack or young Gouda styles," she says. "Then add a 'stretch' cheese or two, perhaps fresh goat cheese or a crowd-pleasing sheep's milk cheese like Manchego to start."

To complement the cheese, add charcuterie, vegetable crudité, fresh or dried fruit, nuts, and bread or crackers to create a well-balanced meal.

At the end of the day, it is most important to know your audience and plan for what they like.

"Creative pairing is a great way to explore new cheeses for both picky eaters and adventurous types," says Toth.

Perfect One Pan Recipes

If you love to cook, but not to do the dishes, look for recipes that require only one pot or pan for even quicker and easier clean-up.

Palmer recommends rotating between crock pot meals that you can prep in the morning—or even the night before—and one-sheet meals that consist of vegetables and a protein like chicken, steak or salmon that you can roast in the oven on one foil-covered baking sheet.

For those nights when you just need something that you can mix up quickly and pop into the oven, Palmer says that Home Chef's weekly rotating menu boasts new Oven Ready options each week. Oven Ready meals have fresh ingredients that come pre-chopped, so you can mix everything together and pull dinner out of the oven with minimal clean-up.

Cook Smarter, Not Harder

Stretching one meal into leftovers is a natural time-saver in the kitchen. Palmer recommends choosing your favorite protein, such as pork shoulder or a whole chicken, and creating multiple meals throughout the week.

"If you're strapped for time, pick up a rotisserie chicken from a grocery store," said Palmer. "You can eat the chicken breast with roasted vegetables one night, shred the thigh meat and make tacos another night, then use the bones to make a flavorful broth, add noodles and you have chicken noodle soup."