

Gathering in the Kitchen: Healthy Eating and Happy Memories

By Tricia Cope

“Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children.”

—The Family: A Proclamation to the World.

“A good nurturer carries power and influence.”—Julie B. Beck

Physical nurturing can significantly enhance the *spiritual nurturing* we do in our homes, bringing power and influence.

We can nurture our families physically through:

1. Regular family mealtime
2. Involving children in food preparation and kitchen chores
3. Feeding our families healthy foods
4. Spending more time at home and in the kitchen

1. Regular Family Mealtime:

“True power is found in the hands of a worthy nurturer, especially at mealtimes.”
--Julie B. Beck, “Powerful Nurturing,” *Ensign*, December 2005

“The number of those who report that their ‘whole family usually eats dinner together’ has declined 33%. This is most concerning because the time a family spends together ‘eating meals at home [is] the strongest predictor of children’s academic achievement and psychological adjustment.’ Family mealtimes have also been shown to be a strong bulwark against children’s smoking, drinking, or using drugs. There is inspired wisdom in this advice to parents: what your children really want for dinner is you.”—Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, November 2007

Nurturing the family at mealtime:

- Teach gospel principles.
- Model good manners for your children.
- Plan ahead. Think of conversation topics before the meal. (Discuss current events; relate a scripture story; talk about a Christlike attribute and how it was seen today at home, work, or school; discuss a good book you’re reading; share something you learned that day; scripture/history quiz with treats.)
- Just enjoy being together!

2. Involving children in food preparation and kitchen chores:

- Plan a weekly menu regularly as a family, and post it where all can see.
- Assign each child a specific night of the week to help prepare dinner.
- Assign kitchen chores. Help children learn to work in the kitchen at a young age. Work together as a family.
- Have a list of meals/foods that children are required to learn how to prepare before they leave home.

3. Feeding our families healthy foods:

“To a great extent we are physically what we eat. ... What need additional emphasis are the positive aspects [of the Word of Wisdom]—the need for vegetables, fruits, and grains. In most cases, the closer these can be, when eaten, to their natural state—without overrefinement and processing—the healthier we will be. To a significant degree, we are an overfed and undernourished nation digging an early grave with our teeth, and lacking the energy that could be ours because we overindulge in junk foods. ... We need a generation of young people who, as Daniel, eat in a more healthy manner than to fare on the ‘king’s meat’—and whose countenances show it (see Daniel 1).”

—Ezra Taft Benson, “In His Steps,” speech given at BYU on March 4, 1979

What should we eat?

“... vegetables, fruits, and grains. In most cases, the closer these can be, when eaten, to their natural state—without overrefinement and processing—the healthier they will be.” (See above)

Rules to recognize real food:

1. Don’t eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food.
2. Shop mostly the outside isles of the grocery store, and avoid the middle isles.
3. Only eat foods with ingredients that an ordinary human would keep in the pantry.
4. Make most meals and snacks at home, from whole food ingredients.

(For other helpful real food tips, see the book *Food Rules* by Michael Pollan.)

Start purchasing and feeding your family real, unrefined foods:

- Clean out your pantry and stock it with real foods.
- Stop purchasing refined food products. Your family will eat what you buy. They won’t go hungry! Do this gradually if you need to. Baby steps.
- Expect them to eat what you serve. There may be some complaining at first, but they will get used to the healthy foods eventually, if that is what you are consistently buying, preparing, and serving. (Remember, whatever you serve

- will be better than the chicken claw soup I was expected to eat in Argentina...and I got used to it!) Your kids will adapt. Be patient.
- Give them healthy options. (Apple or candy? They'll choose the candy. Apple or orange? They'll eat one or the other if they are truly hungry.)
 - Model good, healthy eating for your children. Show them that you enjoy eating good foods!

Real Food Ideas:

Snacks/lunch:

- good cheese with slices of fruit
- veggies with homemade dips like herb dip or hummus
- bananas or apples with peanut butter or cheese
- a slice of whole grain bread with good-quality butter, peanut butter, jam, or cream cheese
- hard-boiled pastured eggs
- berries with raw milk or cream
- air-popped popcorn

Breakfast:

- whole oats with fresh milk
- brown rice cereal
- eggs and good-quality bacon
- homemade bagels
- homemade muffins
- homemade cinnamon rolls
- French toast with whole grain bread
- homemade yogurt with toppings (fruit, nuts, granola, shaved coconut)
- raw milk berry smoothie with whole grain toast

Simple meals:

Fish (wild-caught is better than farmed): grilled, cooked stovetop with olive oil, or baked; covered with herbs and served with salad greens or veggies.

Salmon patties: mix up a can of wild salmon (or leftover cooked salmon) with one beaten egg and some dill, salt, and pepper. Fry in patties on the griddle. We like these topped with tomatoes and greens, or they can be eaten on whole-grain buns or bread as salmon burgers.

Healthy frittata: Beat several eggs with salt and pepper. Add any veggies or greens you have in your fridge. Top with cheese and bake in a casserole pan until cooked through.

Stir fry: Fry chopped onion and minced fresh garlic in olive oil (add finely shredded ginger root for an Asian flair). Add assorted vegetables (snow peas, broccoli, cabbage, greens, bean sprouts, peppers, etc.) and continue to stir-fry until bright and fragrant. Add salt and pepper to taste, and soy sauce if you used ginger. Serve over whole-grain pasta, quinoa, or brown rice.

Beans: Soak dried beans for at least 24 hours in water with one tablespoon lemon juice, vinegar, buttermilk, or yogurt. Rinse. Add salt and simmer until soft. Use in soups and salads, or mashed and spread onto tortillas or bread. (Can be frozen for later.)

Soups: Boil a whole chicken (with an onion, celery, and splash of cider vinegar) for at least an hour. Run stock through a strainer. Pull meat off bones, and add meat back into stock. Add chopped onion, celery, carrots, potatoes, dried oregano, garlic powder, one or two bay leaves, salt, and pepper.

For chicken noodle soup, add whole grain noodles. For chicken and rice soup, add brown rice (cooked or dry). For vegetable soup or minestrone, add diced fresh or canned tomatoes, or tomato sauce, and other vegetables (green beans, corn, peas, lima beans, white beans, cabbage, etc.).

For beef stew or ground beef soup, brown meat (stew meat or ground beef—preferably from naturally raised, grass-fed cows) with diced onion and celery. Add tomato sauce, chicken or vegetable stock, Worcestershire sauce, potatoes, carrots, cabbage, and other vegetables (see vegetable soup above).

Salads: Chop greens and add veggies, cheese, nuts, sunflower seeds, beans, hard-boiled eggs, and chicken, meat, or fish. For dressing, drizzle with olive oil and balsamic vinegar, or other mix of good oil and vinegar.

Desserts/treats: Try to make from scratch, using recipes you already have. Substitute whole grain flour for white flour. Substitute natural sugars for refined white sugar (pure maple syrup, raw honey, molasses, unrefined sugar/Sucanat). Experimenting with sweets is a good way to introduce your kids to unprocessed, real foods.

4. Spend more time at home and in the kitchen:

- Baby steps. Start small. Even a few more minutes a day in the kitchen can make a big difference. Try for one or two family dinners per week, and go from there. Wake up a few minutes earlier to make a good breakfast. Start meal preparation 10 minutes earlier than usual. Set aside 5 minutes per day to teach a child how to do a household chore or cook something.
- Simplify your family schedule. Cut back on out-of-the-home activities, to spend more time together at home.
- Try to prepare simple meals and snacks, from scratch.

- Make your kitchen beautiful, a place you and your family want to spend time. Paint, organize, declutter, clean.
- Set a simple, lovely table to make mealtime special. Have your kids help with this. Let them pick flowers or make a craft for the centerpiece.
- Treat the dinner hour as a sacred time and expect every family member to gather for it.

The Lord will bless us in our efforts to be powerful nurturers. We are participating directly in the His great work.

“Yours is the grand tradition of Eve, the mother of all the human family, the one who understood that she and Adam had to fall in order that ‘men [and women] might be’ [2 Nephi 2:25] and that there would be joy. Yours is the grand tradition of Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel, without whom there could not have been those magnificent patriarchal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which bless us all. Yours is the grand tradition of Lois and Eunice [see 2 Timothy 1:5] and the mothers of the 2,000 stripling warriors. Yours is the grand tradition of Mary, chosen and foreordained from before this world was, to conceive, carry, and bear the Son of God Himself. We thank all of you, including our own mothers, and tell you there is nothing more important in this world than participating so directly in the work and glory of God, in bringing to pass the mortality and earthly life of His daughters and sons, so that immortality and eternal life can come in those celestial realms on high.” —Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Because She Is a Mother,” *Ensign*, May 1997.

As we daily work at the mortality and earthly life of His daughters and sons, may we remember those great and noble mothers who have gone before us, and who gave so very much to bless countless generations, including our own. May we have their strength, courage, and dedication as we nurture the bodies and souls of those who come to earth through us. And may we gather our families around us as we recognize the importance of giving our all to the sacred calling of mother.

Recommended reading:

“Powerful Nurturing” by Julie B. Beck, *Ensign*, December 2005

Food Rules by Michael Pollan

In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan

Real Food: What to Eat and Why by Nina Planck

Parenting: A House United by Nicholeen Peck