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# A Busy Mums Guide to Healthy Eating

*My simple tips to kickstart your healthy eating journey.*





# Welcome

Navigating healthy food choices for yourself and the whole family whilst managing work demands and the endless commitments outside of work can seem impossible to keep track. In reality, if we just break it down into smaller, more manageable “bite size” pieces [pun intended], then it can become a little less chaotic, and a bit more habitual.

In my house, cooking nutritious [or cooking in general] is not my husband's strong suit. Cooking toast is about as good as it gets for him [even boiling a pot of pasta must be done supervised, with strict instructions] He has many, many other talents contributing enormously to other household duties, but cooking? That gene was just never passed on.

The planning/preparing/cooking of all meals, falls squarely with me. As a Nutritionist, this should come naturally ... except, I also hold several thousand other roles and I'm only human. So sometimes good food choices can slip to the bottom of the priority list. Without someone to share this mental and physical load with, it means I have to get strategic and organised. It's not just for the health of my family, but for my own health and wellbeing.

If I'm not nourished and eating to fuel my body, then I cannot keep up with the demands of working parenthood [or just parenthood, let's be honest].

I'm letting you in on my very own strategies, hacks and simple meal tips that help keep myself and my family sufficiently nourished when life gets a bit hectic.



# Meal Planning

We know this is a thing that super organised people do, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming. It is seriously a life saver.

I don't get too specific though. If I feel trapped into certain meals on certain days then I'm more likely to rebel against my own plan and go a bit rogue.

I find sitting down each Sunday and listing at least 5 meals that I will cook and will fit with my week's schedule to be a nice balance of flexible meal planning.

I shop just for those meals, then I map out what days I will most likely cook them on and have that list on the fridge. This still allows flexibility to swap [depending on how my days play out].

**Tip:** Rather than planning your meal around the protein/meat, flip this over and think about how you can build a meal around your vegetables. I like plan my meals around the vegetables I want to use.

Once I have selected these meals, I list out the ingredients for each meal and add those ingredients to my shopping list. I then group them in order of each aisle. GENIUS!



# Meal Prep

A *\*must\** for all working parents. Find a block of time in your week to prepare a bunch of meals in advance.

If that's too challenging then aim to pre-cut veggies and portion them out after each grocery shop. At least future you will do a happy dance because the veggies have been prepared, and we all know that's the *\*most\** annoying task of cooking dinner.

**Meal Prep tip:** Double the amount of ingredients to make extra for lunches. Freeze small portions of left overs for back up meals for the kids.

# Nutrition Tips for the time poor:



We're all time poor, whether we're working or stay at home parents. My biggest tip to avoid reaching for takeaway is to take short cuts. If I didn't? I would be eating chicken nuggets every night.



PRE-CUT EVERYTHING! Or at least buy the pre-cut version. Even if it costs more, I will still buy pre-cut vegetables if I know I need to.



Blend all your vegetables. If you have a food processor, this will be your new best friend. It's also easy to load up sauces/bolognese etc with blended up veggies.



Fill your recipe book with "one-tray" or "one-pot" meals. There are so many options and variations to whipping up a delicious and nutritious meal with just one tray.



We have all had it drilled into us at some point that too much refined sugar is the devil. It's a sneaky little bugger that shows up in a lot of unsuspecting foods. I'm not the type of Nutritionist that's going to tell you to quit sugar... because, #chocolateislife. BUT I wouldn't be doing my job very well if I didn't at least school you on how to identify when enough is enough! In general, if we can all just make a conscious effort NOT to eat the entire block of Cadbury Topdeck, then that's a step in the right direction. Ok?

# Nutrition Tips for the time poor:



Get familiar with the Nutrition Information Panel on packaged foods. Generally, 1tsp of sugar is equal to around 6g. A general guide I like to follow is, products with \*more\* than 4g of sugar per serve is a bit high. If Sugar appears as one of the first ingredients, on the Ingredient List then this is a red flag.



Fruits contain a natural sugar called Fructose, this is a bit different than pure refined sugar known as Sucrose. Too much fructose can make your tummy a bit unhappy, and too much of both of these can make your tummy and your blood sugar levels a little cranky too. This doesn't mean we should avoid fruit. Fruit is our friend, and the added nutrients within food, including fibre shouldn't be ignored. So, don't be afraid to load up on fruit during the day despite what you might see other wellness experts promote on social media.



We want to make sure we are getting a variety of fruits into our diet. However snacking on fruit alone will not help to give you that sustained level of energy. This will lead to the mood dips and sugar cravings.

# Nutrition Tips for the time poor:



As Mum's we want to look for slow releasing energy, to sustain us and keep us level headed during the height of those tantrums at home [and at work HA!]. Foods with a low Glycaemic Index (such as whole wheat and grains, brown rice and pasta) will give you a slower and sustained release of energy throughout the day. Don't forget to balance these out with a range of fruits \*and\* vegetables, and LOADS of water.



Quinoa is a staple in our house. It's easy to cook with, it's versatile and packed full of protein and fibre. A batch of cooked quinoa will last in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 5 days. Add this to bulk up salads, mix in with vegetables, make patties etc. So many options and easy to re-heat.



Fermented foods are a gut healing mega food. Think sauerkraut, kimchi, apple cider vinegar etc. Nutrition from the mindset of "gut healing" will set your body up for optimal health. The gut is our second brain, therefore ensuring that we nourish the gut, means that all o' the good nutrients get distributed properly to where they're needed.

# Nutrition Tips for the time poor:



Bento boxes: These are a fabulous idea for school lunches, allowing your child control over what/how much they eat and providing variety. Making these for your kids on a daily basis? Then make one for yourself! It's a great way to make sure you're adding variety into your snacks/lunches. Even if it means buying two cute bento boxes with a pretty cartoon design. Your colleagues will be totally jealous!



If dinner time is a hectic time and you know that your work hours make cooking dinner for the family a stressful task, then keep it simple and make sure that lunches are your main meal. I work from home and know that I have more time to invest into a decent lunch therefore taking the pressure off me come dinner time. Instead we can just keep dinner light, with basic wraps/salads/pastas/left overs.





Meal time success with kids is more likely when they can be involved in their food choices. This is just bloody horrific for the parents, because we just want to get in, get out and clean up. Just not possible with small kids. If you have the flexibility to involve the kids and sit down as a family, then including dinners that are “build your own” like Taco's/burrito's/platters/wraps are a great way to get a variety of foods into your kids, without it feeling like mission impossible. And remember, it can take 15-20 times for children to be introduced to a new food before they will even want to try it... consistency is key here.




# Nutrition Tips for the time poor:



 Hydration tip: Set reminders in your phone to ensure you're hitting your water intake goal. Staying hydrated is key to maintaining your health and wellbeing.

 Add berries to your breakfast to boost your antioxidant intake for the day.

 Prioritise breakfast. Pack as much nutrient dense food into this meal to prevent unnecessary snacking during the day. Think protein, smart carbs and healthy fats! My go-to is a quick scrambled egg with smashed avo on wholegrain toast. Simple!



*Keep it simple!*

As a busy Mum of three very young boys, my best advice is to stay organised and have a loose plan for the week. Don't put too much pressure on dinner time if your work hours are crazy. Prioritise one meal each day that you feel is achievable and make that your most nourishing meal.

Make a conscious effort to reduce the amount of processed food and refined sugar that you consume. We're not talking about a complete diet overhaul. Just take it slow and make small but sustainable changes to you and your family's diet.

Most of all, just know that food doesn't have to be confusing. Listen to what your body is trying to tell you and eat to fuel that need. Learning to eat intuitively, rather than restricting your diet is more sustainable in the long run and will have you feeling mentally and physically lighter.



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Rebecca is a Public Health Professional, university qualified Nutritionist, and a busy Mum running after three small children. Bek is passionate about postpartum health and wellness, supporting Mum's to prioritise themselves to achieve their health and wellness goals.