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Overcoming Common Barriers to Family Meals

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What stops you from having meals together as a family? Chances are, you're not alone. Life can be chaotic and stressful and sometimes eating together feels like a long shot. Here are some common barriers you may face and how to overcome them.

1. Busy Schedules

Barrier: With work, school, sports, and other activities, finding time to cook and eat together can be tough.

Solution: Look for pockets of time when everyone is available, even if it's just a few nights a week. Try preparing meals on weekends or in the mornings to save time in the evening. Slow cookers and instant pots are great tools for busy families.

2. Picky Eaters

Barrier: It can be frustrating to plan meals when one or more family members are picky eaters.

Solution: Involve picky eaters in the meal planning process by letting them pick out meals or ingredients they like. You can also try making meals where everyone can customize their own plate, like tacos, salads, or pasta bowls.

3. Budget Constraints

Barrier: Healthy eating can seem expensive, making it hard to stick to a budget.

Solution: Meal planning is actually a great way to save money. Plan meals around sales, discounts, and what's in season. If you have a meal planned, you are less likely to eat out and overspend.

Consider buying bulk items you use often, like rice, pasta, or beans. Leftovers can be turned into new meals, reducing waste and saving money.

4. Lack of Inspiration

Barrier: Sometimes, it's hard to think of what to cook, leading to repetitive or boring meals.

Solution: **Keep** a list of family favorites and rotate through them. You can also try finding inspiration online or in cookbooks. If you're stuck, ask each family member to suggest one meal for the week. This takes some pressure off and ensures everyone gets something they like.

5. Different Dietary Needs

Barrier: Managing different dietary preferences or restrictions within the family can complicate meal planning.

Solution: Focus on meals that can be easily adapted for different needs. For example, make a base dish like a stir-fry, and then add different proteins or sides to accommodate everyone. Planning ahead helps you find recipes that work for the whole family or figure out simple adjustments to make a dish suitable for everyone.

6. Lack of Motivation

Barrier: After a long day, the idea of cooking can feel exhausting.

Solution: Keep things simple and have a few go-to meals that you can whip up quickly. One of my favorite quick go-to meals is breakfast foods - pancakes and scrambled eggs are always quick to whip up.

Remember, it's okay to have an "easy" dinner night with something simple like sandwiches or a salad.

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