

# 10 Tips for Healthy, Homemade Meals and Snacks

By Cans Get You Cooking® Registered Dietitian Can-bassadors

If, like 62 percent of moms surveyed, you consider your child a picky eater, then help is on the way! Try these tips to get nutritious, delicious – and easy – meals on the table...and most importantly, into your family's tummies!



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## Start with a well-stocked pantry – or Cantry®

More than two-thirds (67%) of moms surveyed claimed it was difficult to get their children to eat vegetables. After supplying these moms with canned foods and recipe ideas, this claim dropped to 17 percent.



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## Get creative!

All you need for an easy, healthy home-cooked meal is a can opener, a strainer and some imagination. A salad becomes a meal with some canned chicken or salmon; pasta paired with canned crushed tomatoes and some spices make a savory entrée or side dish.



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## Use MyPlate as your meal planning guide

Strive to comprise each meal with about one-quarter protein, one-quarter grains (preferably whole grains), and half fruits and vegetables. Canned fruits and vegetables are all excellent choices, since the nutrition, freshness and flavor are locked in at the peak of harvest. Canned chicken, tuna, salmon and clams are also excellent lean proteins – pre-cooked and ready to go. Don't forget that canned beans count as a protein or a vegetable!



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## Involve children in the meal preparation

Kids are more likely to eat healthy meals if they help make them. Younger kids can pour pre-measured ingredients into a bowl or do the mixing, whereas older children can set the oven, serve as a sous chef and help carry finished foods to the table. Even babies and toddlers can play with plastic mixing bowls and spoons on the floor while mom or dad gets dinner ready.



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## Surrender (some) authority to children

Take meal preparation one step further by having children plan healthy meals and snacks for the family. Rotate among family members – kids included – in choosing what the family will eat on certain nights, or ask the children for input into healthy snacks to keep on hand. According to one surveyed mom, “[My daughter] actually told me that we needed to go buy some canned pears next time we go to the store and even added it to our grocery list. I’m so excited!!!”



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## If at first you don't succeed, try, try again

Experts estimate that it takes anywhere from eight to 20 exposures to a food for a child to learn to like the food.



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## And if you still don't succeed... try another way!

Corn may be corn to you, but to a kid there's a difference between corn on the cob, canned corn, white corn, yellow corn...you name it. A sensory survey of children ages six to 12 found that canned corn is among the most-liked canned vegetables offered. There's even a wide variety among specific canned foods, such as canned whole corn, canned sweet corn, canned fire roasted corn...not to mention regular and lower-sodium options.



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## Have some go-to recipes

A well-stocked Cantry can offer a treasure trove of creative and nutritious meals to keep you cooking throughout the week. Keep a handful of tried-and-true, easy recipes using Cantry essentials on hand when time is tight. Visit [CansGetYouCooking.com](http://CansGetYouCooking.com) or the Cans Get You Cooking [Pinterest](#) page for ideas.



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## Assign a day as meal preparation

Take a weekend day – or whenever you have a chunk of time – and get cookin'! Whip up several days' worth of meals to pull out later. Soups, stews and casseroles are easy and freeze well. This [Shepherd's Pie](#) can be prepared in advance. Just thaw overnight in the refrigerator, add the canned potatoes, and bake for 15 minutes until heated through and the potatoes are golden brown.



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## Honor thy slow cooker

The slow cooker is a busy parent's dream come true. This magical appliance just plugs in and does all the work during the day so everyone can come home to a house full of savory smells and a nutritious, easy homemade meal. And when the recipe calls for canned foods, it's even easier. Try Kelsey Nixon's [Slow Cooker Ragu](#), which is loaded with vegetables and flavor. Serve with pasta.

