

Top Tips and Activities!

Finding Time to Cook



With the hectic lifestyles of today, finding the time to prepare and cook fresh meals everyday has become increasingly difficult. After a hard day at work it's all too easy to arrive home and reach for a ready meal or call for a takeaway, which may only cost a few pounds, but could be the reason for gaining a few unwanted pounds elsewhere...

Lack of time is a huge issue facing many parents, however, here are a few tips and tricks which may just help out a little...

- Invest in a slow cooker. Especially useful for making stews and casseroles, a slow cooker requires little preparation and thought. Add the ingredients after breakfast, switch on and when you return home, dinner is almost ready. Slow cookers are now available for around £10 and many bookshops and internet sites provide recipes dedicated to slow cookers
- If you find making time to cook each day a challenge but can find an hour or so during the week, try making double portions and freezing half for another day. Soup and sauces freeze particularly well and can be divided into portions to make busy evenings easier
- Try to plan your weekly shop. It may sound simple, but having fresh ingredients readily available and avoiding a last minute dash to the shop makes everything a lot easier
- Ask for help! If possible, involve the children in the food preparation. Jobs you could offer include setting the table, washing or chopping vegetables (depending on their age) or even the washing up afterwards!
- Make sure your cupboards and freezer are well stocked. Frozen vegetables are a quick and easy solution when time is tight and work especially well in dishes such as soups and sauces. Tinned

pulses such as kidney beans or chick peas are also a quick solution as they only require a quick rinse before use rather than overnight soaking. Tinned vegetables such as tomatoes could be added to a stew or curry or could provide the base for a sauce. Grains such as rice, cous cous and pasta are all quick to cook, can be stored for a long time and could provide the base for lots of different meals

- Make sure you have the basics. Onions, garlic, tomato puree, stock cubes, herbs and spices and curry pastes could all be used to flavour almost any meal
- Look out for 'store cupboard' recipes. Then if all else fails, you know there are ingredients to make at least one dish for dinner!
- Try to take an interest in food. There are thousands of books, internet sites and TV shows dedicated to food. Even watched or read once in a while, they are valuable sources of information and full of tips about everything from ingredients to technique to meal ideas
- Think ahead. If you are roasting a chicken on Sunday, then use the leftovers for another meal during the week. You could add cooked chicken to salads, sandwiches, pasta or rice dishes, curries or even freeze to use at a later date. Boil the chicken carcass with some vegetables and a few herbs to make chicken stock or add leftover meat, extra vegetables and pulses to make a chicken soup. This could also be frozen and defrosted quickly when required!