



Growing Together: Food, Family and Friends

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This month, we look at saving time on meal preparation, preparing a healthy snack in the microwave and getting kids ready for school or their next steps after high school.

Eat

We may think that cooking takes too much time. You have a growing family, or your child is busy learning how to manage meal preparation as they head out on their own.

Which statements are true of you? Mark with an “X.”

- I plan menus and write grocery lists, so I have meal ideas and the food I need.
- I sometimes prepare portions of a meal in advance.
- I sometimes use leftovers as the basis for another meal.
- Other people in my household help with meal preparation and cleanup.
- I focus my preparation efforts on one portion of the meal. For example, I fix a simple vegetable or salad if the main course is time-consuming.
- I assemble equipment, cooking utensils and ingredients before I begin meal preparation.
- I use time-saving equipment, such as slow cookers and microwave ovens.
- I use the one-pot method. For example, I add vegetables to pasta that is cooking.

Think about the items you marked and the ones you did not mark. These are time-saving strategies, and some may work for you.

Check out **Now You're Cookin'!** for information about how to get food on the table fast and within your budget. **Cooking 101** was developed for young adults on their own. Many of the publications have shopping lists all ready to go.

Hungry for a snack? This snack contains fiber and protein. Pair it with fresh veggies, whole-grain crackers or chips.



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Barbecue Bean Dip

- ½ cup canned vegetarian baked beans, drained
- 3 tablespoons shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons regular or hickory-smoked barbecue sauce
- 2 large carrots, cut into diagonal slices
- 1 medium red or green pepper, cut into chunks
- Whole-grain crackers or baked chips (optional)

Place beans in a small microwavable glass bowl; mash slightly with fork. Stir in cheese and barbecue sauce. Cover with plastic wrap and vent slightly. Microwave on high for 1 minute, stir then microwave for 30 seconds or until hot. Serve with vegetables, chips or crackers.

Makes four servings. Each serving has 80 calories, 1.5 grams (g) fat, 3 g protein, 14 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 250 milligrams sodium.

Connect

Helping Kids Ease Into a Successful School Year

It might still feel like summer, but big yellow buses will soon stop at the corners to take their precious cargo to school. Just like adults need time to prepare for a return to work, kids benefit from routines and support to make a smooth transition back to the classroom. Here are a few simple ways to help your child feel more confident and prepared.

Get Back into a Sleep Routine

A good night's rest is one of the most powerful tools for school success. Start now and gradually move your child back into a regular bedtime schedule.

- Set a consistent bedtime and wake-up time — even on weekends.
- Include calming activities like baths and reading before bed.
- Avoid screens (TVs, tablets, phones) at least an hour before bedtime.
 - ◆ If your child is used to falling asleep with a movie, consider using soft instrumental music instead.

Talk Through Worries

The start of school can bring nervous feelings, especially for younger children or those starting at a new school.

- For kids with separation anxiety, try reading books like “The Kissing Hand” or “First Day Jitters.”
- Visit the school ahead of time and meet the teacher.
- Most importantly, acknowledge your child's feelings and reassure them that feeling nervous is normal.



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Create a Worry Stone Together

Making a worry stone is a fun and calming activity your child can use throughout the school day.

- Twist two colors of polymer clay into coils and combine into a ball about the size of a golf ball.
- Flatten it slightly and press your child's thumb into the center.
- Bake according to the package directions.

Keep it in a pocket to rub when anxious — it's a comforting, tactile tool for kids of all ages.

Savor the Remaining Summer

The end of summer leads to new adventures from preschool to continuing education for graduating seniors. Make the most of the remaining time. Grill something new; preserve some food to make dried fruit leather or dried fruit for snacks. Check out the **food preservation resources** at NDSU Extension to enjoy healthy food for all ages.

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