



MYPLATE FAMILY MEALS



TARGET AUDIENCE:
parents with children
2 through 18 years old



GROUP SIZE:
5 to 7
participants



NEEDED TIME:
45
minutes

▶ SESSION OVERVIEW

This session is intended to help busy parents and caregivers plan, shop, and prepare healthy, low-cost meals for their families and learn ways to let their children help. Participants will discuss the challenges of making affordable and healthy family meals and snacks. An educator will facilitate a discussion about solutions to the challenges identified by the group by sharing ideas from participants as they play the Make a MyPlate Meal game.

Each participant will share how she would make a meal using two “make and serve in a hurry” foods selected from items on display. The foods selected may be for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacks. Participants will share how they plan their low-cost meals and snacks, brainstorming on ways to involve children in preparation. Finally, each parent or caregiver will be challenged to select two timesaving or low-cost ideas they will use in the upcoming week. Parents and caregivers will also identify one way to include children in preparing family meals.

▶ BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES:

After the session participants will be able to:

- Identify two timesaving or low-cost ways to prepare healthy family meals each week.
- Name two tasks their child can do to help make a family meal during the week.

▶ KEY MESSAGES:

- Timesaving tips can help caregivers make tasty and healthy family meals on a budget.
- Children can help adults get ready for and make family meals.

DISCUSSION SESSION

▶ MATERIALS NEEDED FOR SESSION:

- Markers
- Nametags
- Highlighters or pencils (one per participant)
- Flipchart
- MyPlate mini-poster, *What's On Your Plate*—Provide a copy of the mini-poster to everyone.
- Handouts for parent and caregivers: *Make Easy and Healthy Family Meals*, *Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains*, *Get Your Dairy*, and *Look for Lean Protein Foods*.
- Optional handout for kids: *MyPlate Coloring Page*
- Samples of “make and serve in a hurry” foods. Consider the cultural preferences of your audience as you select your samples. Some suggested options include 100% whole-wheat tortilla, hummus with sliced vegetables, and low-fat yogurt; or a small fruit and vegetable plate with whole-wheat crackers and low-fat cheese placed on the side. Arrange the items on a table for everyone to see.

TIP: USE EMPTY BOXES OR CANS FOR THE CANNED AND FROZEN ITEMS. INCLUDE EXAMPLES OF LOW-COST FOODS.

▶ OUTLINE OF 45-MINUTE SESSION:

- Welcome and introduction to MyPlate Family Meals (5 minutes)
- Discussion group activities—How do you decide what to make for dinner? (10 minutes)
- Group activity—Play *Make a MyPlate Meal* game (25 minutes)
- Sum up and home activity—Identify ways to plan, shop, or cook fast and healthy meals and snacks and ways children can help (5 minutes)

The educator should review the information on the handout *Make Easy and Healthy Family Meals* and directions for playing the *Make a MyPlate Meal* game. For additional background information, review “Food Groups Overview” at ChooseMyPlate.gov/food-groups/. Each food group section offers detailed information about what’s in the food group, how much is needed, a description of the health benefits and nutrients, and additional tips (if time permits).

▶ WELCOME TO MYPLATE FAMILY MEALS

Welcome participants and ask them to make their own nametag (first names only). Make sure each has a copy of the family meals handout, session guides, and a highlighter or pencil. Mention other points of interest as needed, such as the location of restrooms and water fountains.

▶ INTRODUCTIONS:

Ask participants to **share the names and ages of their children**. Give participants time to share. Write down their names so that you can call on them during the discussion.

► **DISCUSSION GROUP ACTIVITIES:**

Review the session with the group. Let them know that they will be talking about ways to:

- Plan meals that are easy, tasty, healthy, fast, and affordable
- Shop for low-cost foods—look for foods in all the food groups
- Save time when cooking meals
- Involve children in making meals

► **QUESTION:**

Read the story below aloud. Encourage participants to consider how the following story compares to their day.

“Mom, what are you making for supper?” I didn’t like to hear that question. I often didn’t have an answer. Like most moms, I wanted my family to eat healthier foods. I knew I had to take action. With help from a nutrition educator, I learned that my family needed to eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. I also needed to find ways to cut back on salt and sugars—we love salty foods and everyone has a sweet tooth in my family. I needed a plan to change what we ate and how we ate. My family is so busy...work and school take up most of our time!

Does this sound like you? Pause and let the parents and caregivers think about the question, then ask the following questions. Allow parents and caregivers to share their responses for each question before moving to the next one.

► **ASK:**

How do you decide what to make for dinner?

What does a quick meal look like in your home?

How do you make a healthy meal?

► **POINT OUT:**

- Build a healthy plate using simple, affordable foods from all the food groups—A low-cost food like whole-grain pasta can be made even healthier when you add frozen vegetables along with flavorful spices.
- Cook when you have more time—On the weekend, double the recipe for a casserole and freeze one casserole for the next week. Wash and slice vegetables or make fruit salad a few hours or the day before your meal.
- Offer quick meals or snacks—Microwave, broil, or stir-fry when you can. Use low-cost foods like canned tuna, chicken, or beans in a salad; prepare sandwiches; slice raw vegetables and fruits and choose plain low-fat yogurt as a dip.
- Find ways to stretch your food dollars—Use SNAP benefits, plan meals ahead of time, make a shopping list, check store sales, and buy generic or store brands to make meals on a budget.



▶ **PLAY THE GAME: MAKE A MYPLATE MEAL**

Have each participant pick two different foods from the “make and serve in a hurry” foods that are displayed on the table. You can also ask participants to pick a whole-grain food from the handout *Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains* and ask them how they might make a quick and easy meal. Encourage them to add familiar foods from each food group to complete the meal. Use the handouts *Get Your Dairy* and *Look for Lean Protein Foods* as needed.

After everyone has picked foods, ask a volunteer to share how he or she would use the foods to make a snack or meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner).

Give everyone an opportunity to share their meals and snacks. Write the menus on a flipchart or blackboard if available.

▶ **ASK:**

How can your children help make a meal?

Let the group brainstorm some ideas. Write the ideas on the flipchart.

▶ **SUM UP:**

Review tips on the handout *Make Easy and Healthy Family Meals*.

Refer to pictures of foods on the MyPlate mini-poster for ideas about healthy choices from each of the food groups. Ask participants if they have questions about the handouts *Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains*, *Get Your Dairy*, and *Look for Lean Protein Foods*. Mention that more information and meal ideas are available at ChooseMyPlate.gov.

▶ **HOME ACTIVITY:**

Give each participant a highlighter or pencil. Ask them to highlight or circle two timesaving or low-cost tips on the handout *Make Easy and Healthy Family Meals* that they will try during the upcoming week.

Ask participants to highlight or circle two tasks on the handout that they will let their child do to help make a family meal during the week. Ask them to include their own ideas in the spaces provided.

Offer the optional MyPlate handout *MyPlate Coloring Page* to help participants reinforce the food groups with their children.

For more information visit
www.ChooseMyPlate.gov/myplateformyfamily.html.



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Food and Nutrition Service
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