

“Made at Home” for Your Health

by The American Institute for Cancer Research

Today, fewer Americans cook than in the past. From 1993 to 2001, the percentage of households that cook once a day on average declined from 44.3 percent to 40.5 percent. That change may seem small, but four percent of the U.S. population equals about 11 million people.

Other statistics show that Americans are avoiding the kitchen, too. In 1959, Americans spent 26 percent of their food budgets away from home. By 2000, that amount grew to 47 percent. Furthermore, the purchase of commercially prepared meals, including heat-and-eat packaged foods from supermarkets, has steadily increased.

Most of us know that frozen dinners, fast food and other commercially prepared meals are seldom the most healthful choices. We choose them for convenience. We eat out, order out, take out and drive through to save time and energy. But the growing numbers of overweight people and overweight problems, like diabetes and cancer, should make us think: If we want to control our weight and our health, we need to control what we eat and how much.

The Food Industry Under Attack

Recently, parts of the food industry have been criticized for creating, sizing, and marketing products that contribute to weight problems. As a result, some major corporations have pledged to reformulate and resize some of their products to make them healthier. Already, some fast food restaurants offer a number of lower fat options. But since a complete transformation of the food industry is unlikely, you still should take food preparation into your own hands as much as possible. The reasons to make your own meals and snacks include:

- Increasing the amount of fiber and nutrient rich ingredients, like vegetables and fruits
- Controlling the type and quantity of fat
- Limiting the amount of sugar and salt
- Sizing portions for your calorie needs

Make Time for Cooking

In a new brochure, called *Homemade for Health*, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) outlines ways to prepare healthy meals during today's busy schedules. Among the many tips to speed up food preparation, one is the use of the microwave and freezer. A four-step plan for your homemade meal could be:

- Set aside a convenient time for cooking, either on the weekend or during the week
- Double or triple a recipe
- Divide the finished food into individual or family-sized portions and freeze
- On days when you lack time for cooking, defrost the right number of portions in the microwave and serve

The brochure also suggests making food preparation a family affair. Pull a stool up to the sink to let small children wash vegetables. Or hand them a clean pair of child's scissors to trim the ends off fresh green beans. Older children can make a side dish or take turns as the head home chef. By practicing how to cook, children learn a skill that they will need throughout their adult lives for good health.

To order your free copy of AICR's brochure *Homemade for Health*, which includes recipes, call 1-800-843-8114, ext. 110.

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