



healthyfood@sport

Family Mealtime: Benefits and How to Avoid the Madness– Fact sheet



Sharing foods in a pleasant social environment is healthy for families in many ways. It is an effective avenue for promoting mental, physical and emotional health. Studies show that people tend to eat a more balanced diet during their family meal times, leading to **better nutrition**. Children are more **emotionally stable** and are **less affected by mental disorders** such as depression and anxiety. Studies also indicate children who have been brought up with family mealtimes are **less likely to partake in alcohol or drug abuse**. Research also indicates that children who are exposed to adult conversation **have better vocabularies, reading skills and speaking skills**.

Another bonus is the **family bond and communication improves**, giving each family member time to share ideas, thoughts and feelings. It is an opportunity to hear about the highs and lows of each family member's day, therefore building support for each other and celebrating each other's successes.

Family mealtimes provide great opportunities for **teaching life skills** such as cooking. Children may learn by:

- making healthy food choices
- regulating portion sizes according to their own feelings of hunger and fullness
- practising hand and eye coordination skills such as pouring, scooping, serving, sharing and taking turns
- building self-confidence and self-esteem
- taking responsibility for setting the table, preparing food and cleaning up
- Lastly, family mealtime enables parents to teach children manners, values, problem solving skills and how to save money





How can we avoid mealtime madness?

- Turn off the television during mealtime.
- Plan ahead every week with an agenda for work, school, and other activities that may affect mealtime.
- Have cut-up raw veggies (carrots, celery, cucumber, broccoli etc.) on hand with some hummus or beetroot dip so kids can snack on them if they are hungry and if dinner schedule is running late.
- Get everyone involved in cooking and cleaning activities.
- Plan simple and quick meals. Make a list of easy family favourites to keep on hand for hectic days.

Beef, Broccoli and Snow Pea Stir-fry Recipe

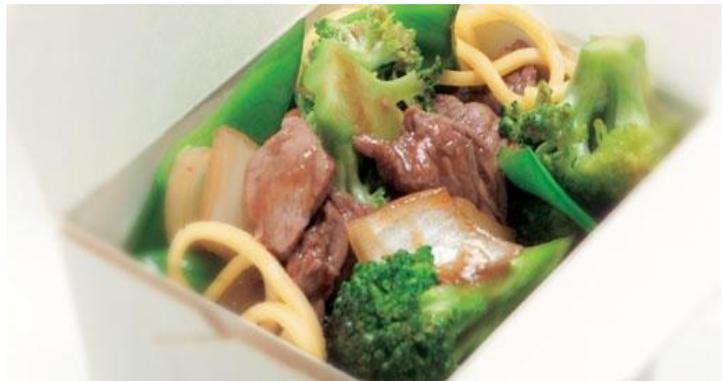
Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Serving size: 4

Ingredients:

- 250g cooked Hokkien egg noodles
- 2 teaspoons oil
- 400g rump steak, sliced
- 1 medium brown onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic crushed
- 1 teaspoon ginger, peeled and grated
- 1/2 head broccoli, cut into florets
- 100g snow peas, ends and strings removed
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- 1 teaspoon cornflour
- 1/2 tablespoon reduced-salt soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon chilli sauce



Method:

Prepare noodles following packet directions. Heat oil in pan, stir-fry beef in two batches, set aside and keep warm. Add onion, garlic and ginger, cooking until onion is translucent. Add broccoli, snow peas and water, cooking until vegetables soften. Return beef to pan. In a small bowl combine water, cornflour and sauces. Stir through beef and vegetables and allow to bubble and thicken.

Variation: Substitute 400g lean pork leg steak for beef. Replace broccoli and snow peas with other vegetables e.g. Chinese cabbage, bok choy and sliced carrots.

Recipe courtesy of Go for 2& 5® www.qofor2and5.com.au

Acknowledgments:

- Dietitians Association Australia www.daa.asn.au
- Nutrition Australia www.nutritionaustralia.org
- Kidspot kitchen www.kidspot.com.au
- Greater Good: University of California Berkeley www.greatergood.berkeley.edu

To access the range of fact sheets and newsletters in this series please visit:

www.health.act.gov.au