



In This Issue

- Back to School
- Ways to Help Your Children Cope With Change
- Menu Planning Made Simple
- The Family Meeting
- Childcare Referrals

Back to School

The back to school sales started in July, but now it's real. Summer's almost over, and it's time to start getting organized for the school year ahead.

Whether you're mourning the end of carefree summer days or counting the minutes until your kids are back in their routine, fall is a great time for new beginnings. Here are some tips to make the changes ahead good ones for you and your family.



Ways to Help Your Children Cope With Change

Unlike adults, children lack control over many aspects of their lives. That's why they feel more comfortable with routines and familiar faces. Children can feel confused, afraid and even hostile when they find themselves in the midst of a change brought about by a family move, the addition of a new family member or other transitions.

The good news is that children are adaptable to change, especially when they're prepared well in advance. Once a child learns that a change is about to occur, he or she will begin to make emotional adjustments to accommodate the new situation. When a child begins to accept the change, the entire family will be better equipped to make a smoother transition.

Parents can use diplomacy and negotiation skills to introduce minor changes into a schedule. For example, if you're unable to go to the library on your regularly scheduled day, try to give your child an alternative, so expectations are still met. Perhaps your sitter could go with your child to the library instead. Your child may even welcome this new adventure.

For more substantial changes, try to give a child as much advance notice as possible. Introduce changes gradually. For example, if your child will be going to a new child care provider, take her to the site for a preliminary visit. Let her bring a favorite stuffed animal or prized blanket. This will give her something tangible to identify with and will help take the uncertainty and fear out of the new situation.

Children need more preparation to get used to major changes, such as the addition of a new sibling. Expect some rough spots in times of major transition.

- Allow plenty of time to discuss how your child's life will be different with a younger brother or sister.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and express fears.
- Look for children's books that deal with major life changes for kids. Use the situations and characters in the book to help your children talk about their own feelings.

When big changes occur in your child's life, try to keep some routines the same. Consistent morning, dinner and bedtime rituals can comfort children when major changes are afoot.



Menu Planning Made Simple

[We're here to help!](#)

Log in to your [Wellness Resource Center](#) to assess your wellbeing - you'll receive a personalized wellbeing report and action plan.

Call MHN using the toll-free number to the right - an intake representative will explain your benefits and connect or refer you to a professional who can help.

It's 5:00 - do you know what you're having for dinner? If so, congratulations! You're probably less stressed, with the ingredients ready and waiting for a healthy meal you actually have time

to prepare. If not, you may be dreading coming home to an empty refrigerator, tempting you to give in to pleas for fast food or pizza.

Preparing healthy meals during the week really can be easy if you have a good plan. Here are some tips to help you get started. To find recipes for all of the dishes mentioned below, plus hundreds of other healthy recipes, click on the resources tab in the [Wellness Resource Center](#).

WHAT IS A HEALTHY MEAL, ANYWAY?

The USDA's current dietary guidelines can be found on [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#), along with a sample menu for adults, specialized tips for kids of all ages and plenty of recipes. The biggest change? Research now suggests that over half of our plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables, and that at least half of the grains we eat should be whole grains. The Harvard School of Public Health has weighed in with a recommendation that we add refined grains and red and processed meats to our "use sparingly" category, along with butter, sugar and salt.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT BREAKFAST!

If you have kids, you've probably explained the importance of eating a healthy breakfast many times. Do you follow your own advice? Whole grain cereal with milk and fruit is a healthy, easy choice, but here are some ideas to make breakfast a bit more interesting:

- Have homemade muffins in your freezer, made with whole grains and fruit or vegetables (check out recipes for rhubarb and berry nut muffins, blueberry muffins with hazelnuts and pumpkin spice muffins).
- Make a smoothie with fat-free or low-fat yogurt, a banana, and your choice of fresh or frozen fruit.
- For a low-fat breakfast packed with protein and vitamins, try a frittata or omelet with egg whites and veggies left over from last night's dinner.

BEYOND PB&J

With a little creativity, sandwiches or wraps with whole grain bread or tortillas can be nutritious and convenient brown bag staples. Swapping bananas, raisins and/or apple slices for jelly can transform a peanut butter sandwich into a nutritional powerhouse. Shredded carrots, sliced cucumbers and grilled eggplant or zucchini will liven up your turkey sandwich, or perhaps convince you to skip the turkey all together.

Lunch doesn't have to come between two slices of bread, though. Instead, you can try:

- Salad in a jar - Layer salad ingredients in a glass jar, putting the salad dressing and sturdiest ingredients (shredded carrots, beans, lentils, etc.) at the bottom and the most delicate ingredients (lettuce, spinach) at the top. When it's time for lunch, upend the jar into a bowl and enjoy.
- Take a dip - Prepare a healthy, high-protein dip (such as black-eyed pea hummus, white bean spread with spinach and red peppers, or creamy feta spread) and pack it with cut up vegetables and whole-grain pita wedges.

- Warm up - If you have a microwave at work, leftover casserole, chili or soup can make a hearty lunch the next day. If you'd like to pack soup or chili in an insulated container, the USDA recommends filling the container with boiling water first, to heat it thoroughly, and then (after pouring out the water) adding the food while it's piping hot. Close the container quickly and keep it closed until lunchtime to keep the food at 140°F or above.

DINNER IN ADVANCE

Buying dinner from your store's freezer section is convenient, but commercially prepared frozen meals are often high in sodium and nutritionally out of balance. Why not make your own frozen meals? You'll save money, and you can control the ingredients and add a salad for a tasty, well-balanced meal. Here are some dishes that freeze well:

- Soups and stews - Check out recipes for powerhouse white bean soup, lentil barley stew, and emerald spinach soup with tomato.
- Chili - Go vegetarian, with black bean or sweet potato chili, or add lean cuts of chicken, turkey or beef.
- Casseroles and one-pot meals - In addition to your family's favorites, try some new additions, like barley, turkey and butternut squash casserole; spicy pumpkin curry with black-eyed peas or black bean and chicken enchiladas.

A few warnings:

- Watch out for ingredients that don't freeze well, like potatoes, cream and ricotta cheese, sour cream and salad greens.
- Wrap, label and date foods carefully before freezing. Frozen foods will taste better if they're frozen quickly, so avoid stacking items in the freezer during the freezing process.
- Move frozen foods to the refrigerator in the morning or the night before to thaw for that night's dinner. Never thaw frozen food at room temperature.

SALADS WITH A SHELF LIFE

A green salad with fresh vegetables is healthy, tasty and convenient, but leftovers don't keep too well. Here are a few nutritionally rich salads that you can make ahead of time and keep in your fridge for a few days:

- Quinoa salad with roasted autumn vegetables
- Black beans with corn and tomatoes
- Mediterranean lentil salad

MAKE IT WORK

Now that you have some ideas, it's time to make a plan. Involve family members in menu planning, shopping and ahead of time prep - teamwork makes everything more fun. The [Wellness Resource Center](#) has some very yummy (and healthy) dessert recipes, too!



The Family Meeting- A Great Communication Tool

A regular family meeting can help transform a chaotic household into a more cooperative team. Schedule a meeting once a week to discuss goals, problems and family events. Use the meeting as a time to talk about menus and assign household errands. Try to make the meeting fun. Order your favorite take-out meal or serve a special dessert.

Family meetings serve another function besides providing a way to assign household chores. They teach children that members of a family can work together to make decisions and create thoughtful solutions to problems. While they don't substitute for intimate time with each other, family meetings help create a climate of cooperation while smoothing the way for busy families with too much to do.

INVOLVE THE KIDS

As soon as children are old enough, include them in family decisions, such as whose turn it is to help with the shopping. Discuss how you can share responsibilities and improve weekly routines, such as meal preparation, laundry and bathing. Children who participate in these discussions will develop a sense of teamwork.

USE THE TIME TO ORGANIZE

Discuss household chores and schedules. Ask your spouse and your kids if there are any particular tasks they like, then let them have responsibility for those jobs. Plan weekly menus and post them on a master calendar. Also post doctor appointments and school events. Discuss changes in parents' and kids' work and school schedules.

CLEAR THE AIR

Use this time to review family goals. Discuss annoyances and problems that have cropped up during the busy week. For example, this is the perfect time for a family member to complain if they feel they've taken out the garbage too many weeks in a row.

MAKE PLANS FOR FUN

Use family meetings to make long-range vacation plans and schedule weekend excursions. Plan picnics and parties; decide what your family would like to buy a grandparent as a birthday gift; talk about holiday celebrations and plans to entertain family friends of all ages.



Childcare Referrals

If you're a working parent, you know how frustrating childcare issues can be, and how daunting it can be finding care you trust that's right for your child. In addition, returning to work while staying connected to your family can be a tough and emotional

transition. The articles and tools below can help you learn how to handle the difficulties involved while finding the best childcare option to meet your needs.

You can also [search for childcare providers](#) online.

GETTING STARTED IS EASY!

Call your EAP for more information

When you call MHN for childcare assistance, our care consultants help you:

- Assess your childcare needs
- Understand the differences in cost and structure of the types of childcare available for infants, preschoolers and school-aged children
- Identify and evaluate childcare and special needs resources and providers

Your assigned care consultant will even give you a list of local providers that meet your childcare needs.

Refer to [My Benefits](#), for more information.

ARTICLES AND TIPS

- [Staying Connected to Your Family](#)
- [Communicating with Your Child Care Provider](#)
- [The Toughest Transition: Leaving Your Child to Return to Work](#)
- [Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself](#)

Getting Started is Easy!
Call your EAP for more information.