

NEW YEAR,

New Family Traditions!

by Michelle Vicari, OAC Chairwoman

Our hectic on-the-go lifestyles can impact our family's health. Rushing to and from school, work and other obligations can sometimes make it hard to make the healthiest choices – from nutritious food to physical activity. We know how these choices can negatively affect many aspects of our health, but we also know what a positive impact just a few healthier changes can make!

The New Year is a perfect time to establish fun, memorable family traditions such as cooking fresh meals together and being more active as a team. Let's dive into some great examples!

Prepare, Cook and Eat Healthy Food... Together

Research has shown that simply eating together as a family can improve health¹. Family meals are the perfect venue to talk about healthy eating habits. They are also a great way to engage in conversation about what nutritious food looks and tastes like.

But even better... how about creating a family meal together? There are so many lessons to be learned for children through hands-on cooking:

- **Math:** Measurements, fractions, time.
- **Science:** Liquids, solids, melting, freezing.
- **Language:** Chop, mince, sauté, chiffonade.
- **Culture:** Learning traditions beyond our own.

“ Family meals are the perfect venue to talk about healthy eating habits. ”



That sounds good in theory, but how do you get started? First, choose a healthy recipe at least once per week that you can cook together. Look for a recipe that uses a vegetable you've never tried or food from a country you want to learn more about. **Pinterest.com** has some great recipe boards (*Try Produce for Kids; Kids Eat Right*) or find a favorite healthy cookbook at your local library (*Try authors Elie Krieger or Catherine McCord*). You can also try one of the following family-friendly recipes listed below.



Greek Salad with Chicken

Salad Ingredients:

- 2 plum tomatoes, diced
- 1 ½ English cucumbers, diced
- 1 bell pepper, finely diced
- 3 tablespoons red onion, finely diced
- ½ cup kalamata olives, pitted, halved
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 cup cooked rotisserie chicken, chopped

Dressing Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons honey dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning
- ¼ cup olive oil

Instructions:

Measure-out and mix dressing ingredients into a small bowl and set it aside. With adult supervision, chop and dice the vegetables and place them into a large bowl. Add dressing to taste. Toss to coat all vegetables. Top with crumbled feta cheese and chopped chicken. Enjoy!

Bonus: Extend the Activity!

Have your children identify Greece on a map. Greece is the birthplace of the Olympic Games, including races. After dinner, play a few rounds of "Egg & Spoon Race" together. Balance an egg (*plastic, hard-cooked or even a tennis ball will work*) on a wooden spoon and race to the finish line without dropping it.



Build Your Own Baked Taco

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Spray a 6-cup muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray and place a fajita-sized tortilla in each, folding the tortilla slightly to fit. Bake the tortillas for 14 minutes or until crisp and golden on the edges. Under supervision, prepare and assemble your taco fillings.

Taco Filling Ingredients:

- refried beans
- chopped tomatoes
- shredded lettuce
- shredded cheese
- sliced avocado
- Greek yogurt or sour cream
- cooked chicken, steak, shrimp or fish

(Optional) Breakfast Taco Ingredients:

- refried beans
- scrambled eggs
- shredded cheese
- salsa
- sliced avocado
- cooked and crumbled turkey sausage (*or soy crumbles*)



Bonus: Extend the Activity!

Tacos are an interpretation of a recipe with origins in Mexico. Mariachi music and dance are essential parts of Mexican culture. Search online for some Mariachi music, listen to its unique sounds, then feel the music and dance together.

NEW ACTIVITY

Create a Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt!

Take a walk together and check-off each item as you spot it. Do this as a family or even along with other families in your neighborhood. The more the merrier!



Add More Activity to Your Family's Lifestyle

Modeling to children that you value fitness helps to create a solid foundation for a lifetime of healthy physical activity. Getting fit as a family does not have to be time-consuming or complex! Try to fit a few of the following fun activities into your family's daily life and make them a habit.

- Take an evening walk after dinner.
- Ask an elderly neighbor if they would like your family to walk their dog.
- Keep a ball or Frisbee in your car so you're always ready to play.
- Utilize technology like apps and websites (*Geoaching, Pokémon Go, Couch to 5k*).
- Buy everyone a pedometer for tracking steps! The family member with the most steps each week can win a prize like a movie night pick or choice of the next healthy dinner recipe.
- Draw a hopscotch path on your sidewalk or driveway.
- Seek-out a volunteer opportunity for the family once a month (*Visit: VolunteerMatch.org for activities like a beach or park clean-up*).
- Complete a neighborhood scavenger hunt (*See tips in this article*).

I hope you will consider adopting a few of these ideas into your family's life, and that 2019 is your family's healthiest and happiest year yet!

References:

1. Hammons, A.J., & Fiese, B.H. (2011). "Is frequency of shared family meals related to the nutritional health of children and adolescents?" *Pediatrics*, 127 (6): 1565-1574.

About the Author:

Michelle "Shelly" Vicari, OAC Chairwoman, majored in Child Development and Family Studies as well as Political Science at San Diego State University. She is the former Curriculum Director of the largest National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited Child Care Centers in Southern California. She has authored many curriculum guides for teachers working with young children and was lucky enough to once meet Mr. Fred Rogers!



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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