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EXCLUSIVE!

DAVINA McCALL

‘How I’ll stress less in 2010’



POINTS MEAN PAMPERING



Family mealtime makeovers

Try these easy ways to healthy, happy eating that won't break the bank



it's 7.30pm on the second Tuesday in January. As you guiltily slide a couple of frozen pizzas into the oven, you wonder how your new year plan to sit down as a family every night at 7pm to eat a healthy, home-cooked dinner could have gone so wrong.

'Be realistic,' says Boots nutritionist Vicky Pennington, 'as you're more likely to succeed that way. It's better for you to make a series of small, enduring changes that add up to improved health, than one sweeping revolution that lasts just a few days.'

But what are those small 'healthier' changes that we can all make? Is it really so simple? We asked Vicky and children's nutrition expert Annabel Karmel for their top tips...

1 *Mix your own cereal*

Encourage your children to help you make your own family blend of oats, raisins and other dried fruits into a muesli once a week for breakfast. 'It's a great way to avoid the added salt and sugar in lots of regular cereals,' Vicky explains, 'while also teaching children that food is fun.'

Getting kids off to a healthy start with their first meal of the day is crucial, she says, 'because we take on a third of our day's food at breakfast. It's important that we try to take on a third of our daily recommended nutrients at the same time, as it's usually too difficult to cram all our nutrients into just lunch and dinner.' A wholegrain-based cereal or muesli, with some added fruit and – even better – a glass of fruit juice, too, should keep everyone going till lunchtime.

SAVE! 'Individual ingredients bought in bulk usually work out cheaper,' says Vicky.

2 *Add extra vitamins*

If you're supplementing your children's diets with vitamins and minerals, it can be hard to remember to give them regularly. Make it easier by including supplements in their daily routine and giving them at breakfast. Buy age-specific vitamins, to be sure everyone's getting what they need.

SAVE! It's 3 for 2 (cheapest free) on vitamins in Boots.

3 *Make fruit less fiddly*

'Whole fruit can be offputting for kids,' says Annabel. Instead, chop it into bite sizes and thread onto skewers. 'Make these in bulk and wrap in wet kitchen towel in the fridge to keep them fresh.' You can also encourage kids to eat veg by making it more finger-friendly. 'Sugar snap peas and carrot sticks are always popular, because they're both sweet and easy to handle. Or try savoury skewers of cherry tomatoes and cucumber cubes with mini-mozzarella balls, making sure an adult is always present when using skewers.'

SAVE! 'You won't be wasting money on food that no one eats,' says Annabel.

4 *Start healthy eating early*

'Wean babies onto as wide a range of foods as possible,' says Annabel. 'You might as well give kids the chance to develop a taste for as many health-giving fruits and vegetables as you can, which will stand them in good stead for later life.' Don't panic if little ones refuse your healthy offerings at first, though. 'Tastes ▶

change over time, so make a mental note to reintroduce unpopular flavours at a later date. They may start to like them the second time around,' she says.

SAVE! While home-made purées are cost effective, investing in ready-made organic purées such as those by Plum Baby can be invaluable in saving you that other key 'mummy commodity': time.

5 Teach them about food

Help your children to understand where food comes from, as well as adding flavour to it, by encouraging them to grow their own herbs in a pot on a windowsill. 'Basil goes particularly well with tomatoes in a pasta sauce, and is always popular with kids,' says Annabel. 'And because herbs are so flavoursome, you're less likely to need to season with salt.'

As well as basil, Annabel suggests giving little green fingers sage, thyme, dill and chives to grow, as they're both hardy and tasty. 'You can make delicious chicken burgers by mixing minced chicken, sautéed diced onion, grated apple, breadcrumbs and fresh sage,' she says. 'Fresh thyme is good in beefburgers, and dill and chives go well with fish dishes.'

SAVE! A potted plant can produce tasty herbs for far longer than a jar of the dried variety usually lasts.

6 Share the cooking

Give tweens and teens a regular night in the kitchen. Not only do you get time off, but they learn a valuable life skill.

'I used to get my three children to cook dinner one night a week. Not

For more info on healthy eating for children, go to www.boots.webmd.com

only did it give them a love of cooking, but when my son went off to university it did a lot for his popularity, too!' says Annabel. She suggests keeping recipes simple – a hot chicken salad, pasta with a vegetable sauce, or salmon baked in foil – and introducing them on a month-by-month basis.

'Let's say that Wednesday is "kids in the kitchen night",' Annabel says. 'For the first Wednesday of the month, you show them how it's done. Then, for the following three Wednesdays, they try to do that recipe themselves. By the end of the month they'll be cooking it with confidence and keen to try adding the next new recipe to their repertoire.'

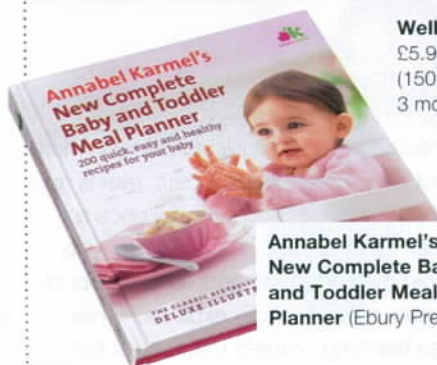
SAVE! Make it the night of the week you're most likely to resort to a takeaway and you'll save a small fortune each time.

7 Always be prepared

Make sugar-fuelled, knee-jerk responses to hunger pangs a thing of the past by packing your own snacks. 'It's easier to eat healthily if you've planned ahead,' says Vicky. 'On days out, take along dried fruit, veg sticks, rice cakes and breadsticks, and you won't be so tempted by fat-, salt- and sugar-packed crisps, chocolate, biscuits and sweets.' Opt for wholegrain varieties wherever possible to avoid the sugar-rushes and energy-slumps of traditional carb-filled snacks.

SAVE! Make your own popcorn for the cinema. 'Popcorn is a wholegrain,' says Vicky, 'so it's healthy as long as you don't slather it in butter and sugar or salt.' ■

HEALTHY FAMILY HELPERS



Annabel Karmel's New Complete Baby and Toddler Meal Planner (Ebury Press)

Wellkid Baby & Infant, £5.99/599 points (150ml); for ages 3 months to 5 years



Plum Organic Superfoods For Babies: Plum, Pomegranate & Guava, (100g); for ages 4 months +



Organix Finger Foods Organic Apple Rice Cakes (50g); for ages 7 months +

Boots Multivitamin Gummy Bears* £5.99/599 points (30 packets); for ages 3 to 12 years



Breville Baby Meal Times Set (contains blender, chopper, beaker, pots, spatula, spoon and recipe book)

*Part of the 3 for 2 offer on vitamins and herbals (cheapest free).