



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Avoid the dinnertime rush hour; use a menu planner

*By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Do you find yourself struggling to decide what to have for dinner 30 minutes before it needs to be on the table? An all too familiar sound in many homes around dinnertime is the kids saying, “Mom, I’m hungry – what’s for dinner?” Many families find themselves peering into the refrigerator or stopping off at the closest fast-food restaurant to grab something to eat.

To help make life a little easier when it comes to eating, try using a meal planner. Something as simple as a weekly calendar with a shopping list attached to it will work. To help make that shopping list a little easier to fill in, keep a list of foods you use almost every day beside the planner on your refrigerator.

Getting started

Pick a day to fill out your weekly menu and involve the family. Allow your children to help plan the menu; have each child plan a dinner along with adding necessary items to the shopping list. This is a great time for children to share what they may be learning about nutrition in school – depending on their age. You can use this time to talk about choosing foods that help children grow, according to www.MyPyramid.gov.

Tools to use

Using tools can help your menu planning go smoothly, along with helping save money and time. With a little organization, using these tools to help create a menu can greatly reduce the stress level around dinnertime for everyone.

Tools include: Find out what is on sale for the week on www.commissaries.com, and use the coupon sites there. Gather your coupons and keep them in the car for the shopping trip. This means less chance of forgetting them when you are in a hurry. Check your pantry and refrigerator to see what foods are already on hand, and make sure to include these foods in your weekly menu to help save even more money.

Going for the gold

Take it a step further and decide who is going to prepare different foods for different dinners. Of course, this depends on your children's ages, skill levels and after-school activities. Involving your children with the smallest tasks to the most advanced food preparation tasks can be a learning experience that begins at a young age and advances as they grow. With a little help, very young children can wash vegetables, set the table, and pour, measure and stir ingredients. Older children can prepare simple foods and help guide younger children, too. Learning how to cook can be fun and educational for everyone, while providing many opportunities to share and appreciate real food together as a family.

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on <http://www.commissaries.com> and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian's Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on www.twitter.com and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious recipes, check out Kay's Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support*

element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.