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My Mealtime Adjustments...Efficiency for Eating Well

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I owe you an explanation. First, my gulity conscience needs to address my blogging abscence. And second, during my time away I've made some adjustments in Happily Whole's meal philosophy, for which I simply must share!

I never thought that I'd value efficiency in the kitchen as much as I do now! I far prefer puttering around on Pinterst for inspiration, recreating each concoction until I establish the best balance

between deliciousness and nutritious-ness and basking in my secret satisfaction in multi-step recipes.

But, now ease and efficiency in preparing our family's healthy meals take priority!

My heart's desire and my passion for real food make me want to slow down and savor each aspect of creating a new meal from grocery store adventures to taking that first taste. I enjoy attempting new skills, using new gadgets (like the new 14 cup food processor I got for Christmas and fell head over heels in love with!) and experiment with alternative ingredients. I relish the challenge to create something delectable with superior nourishment without sacrificing great taste.

But when my past life as a widowed mom collided with a new life as a wife [1]and step mom of three additional daughters, all attempts to savor stopped. I'll be the first to admit that going from a little family of three to a family of seven rocked my world! I knew things would change. My home might be a bit messier. My organizational skills would certainly be taken to task. And the learning curve of living with a man and three young teens presents unique challenges for a lady accustomed to little girl issues and managing my world on my own. But, I never guessed how it might sabatoge my blogging abilities and creativity in the kitchen....if I allow it!

Anyways, if you'd wondered, my complete lifestyle overhaul and the accompanying time it took to transition has been the reason for my blogging hiatus. My mind's been whirling and my body hasn't stopped. Don't you worry though! This new life hasn't turned me into a bon-bon eating, lethargic lady no longer concerned with wellness. The exact opposite, actually. I'm learning to rise to the occasion in skills and creativity in the kitchen! I, um, just haven't had time to blog about it.

I'm finally feeling adjusted to the loads of laundry coming out of my ears, the incredible volume of driving to and from extracurricular activities, juggling seven schedules and preparing food for multiple people and preferences. Oh, and did I mention intercepting the multiple female emotions bouncing from the walls threatening to burst? It's true--hormones run high and that's probably why I've managed to maintain my exercise routine [2]-- as my main sanity strategy!

But, now I'm back to blogging!

And, my aim is the same! I'm not sacrificing ingredient research or neglecting my goal to balance just the right nourishment with tempting your taste buds. In fact, I think I may be even better able to gauge what you're looking for in a meal since I now have to please multiple palates right here at home....and believe me, some are pickier than others. It's to your advantage, really—I've got built-in taste testers!

So, I'm not letting my passion for real food recipes go. But I am making a few adjustments for efficiency:

- **More MEAL recipes.** I'd been accustomed to such simple meals for my little family of three and rarely felt they were blog-worthy. I also preferred experimenting with baking [3]more than cooking, as evidenced on the blog. But, now cooking for seven has required me to fine tune my meal planning and main dish creating.
- **More meat in my recipes.** *I still greatly favor a plant based [4] diet for health and my personal preference*! But, I have started using more unprocessed, high quality meats to supplement our protein needs and the family's preferences (i.e., large two hundred pound man). You'll notice grass fed beef and antibiotic/hormone free animal products around here more.
- **Meal planning and main dishes prepped ahead.** I hope you find this advantageous too! Often, I make meals to be frozen for future use or can be baked at a later time. It's key to eating healthy as a larger family. Sometimes I prepare dinner in the morning, refrigerate it and bake it later or even

the next day. This helps when we're running around and arrive home just in time for everyone's appetite to kick into overdrive!

I'm hoping each of my mealtime tweaks meet your family's needs, too! After all, who doesn't want to amp up their nutrition while implementing some simple organizational strategies? For me, it's saved my sanity as well as allowed me to feed my much bigger family well.

Here's one dinner dish indicative of all three of my meal adjustments: **Spinach, Mushroom and Sausage Baked Mostaccioli** [5]

It's a meal with meat (although optional) that can be prepped ahead and doubled. I put one pan into the freezer for a later date. The other goes into the fridge for the same evening, taken out and placed in the oven with the 'delay bake' option set so I can do my after school running taxiing while it bakes. That way, we still eat at a reasonable time as a family.

Mission accomplished with this recipe! ALL seven family members loved it (although one picked out the mushrooms), this mama was happy we sat to eat as a family AND we were all cleaned up by 6pm with evening remaining for homework and playtime. BAM! Here's the recipe: **Spinach, Mushroom and Sausage Baked Mostaccioli** [5]

So, you see…**I'm learning to saver the sweetness of efficiency!**

Disclaimer: Dinnertime doesn't always happen so smoothly, but I'm always working towards it. And when things fall apart, I'm learning to roll with it!

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