

Grocers Have Wellness Opportunity in Suggesting Dinner Solutions

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In an effort to answer the proverbial question of “what’s for dinner?” retailers are working hard to find easy, tasty, affordable and wholesome solutions to America’s favorite meal. Dinnertime might be the best opportunity we’ve had all day to unwind and be more intentional in our food choices.

Sitting down to a family (or group) meal might make a greater impact than we realize. Each September, the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) Foundation touts National Family Meals Month to urge families to gather around the table.

According to The Hartman Group, 68 percent of consumers say that dinner is the meal that most people in the household eat together. Frequent family meals, defined by the *Journal of Pediatrics & Child Health* as at least three meals a week, can significantly improve family connection, self-esteem, well-being, positive social behaviors and stronger family relationships while decreasing the chance of “risky” behaviors.

Up the ante by inviting the whole family to get involved in the kitchen and to adapt their plates to their own liking, such as more or fewer grains in their rice bowls, extra or no salsa in their tacos, or double or no mushrooms on their pizza.

Ground-up Solutions

In putting together ideas for dinnertime, recommend that shoppers start from the ground up by beginning with easy staples.

To craft a meal, it can be simple to begin with steamed quinoa, frozen vegetables, canned beans, refrigerated greens or dry pasta. Add favorite lean proteins from turkey to tofu, top with seasonings from sage to smoke, and finish with fruit from bananas to blackberries.

Constructing a meal can be a creative outlet. Urge shoppers to browse family cookbooks, ebook recipes, Pinterest posts, grocery store recipe cards or a nearby bookstore for food inspiration. Also, encourage shoppers to assign different nights of the week ethnic dinner “themes” such as Italian, Greek, Indian, Lebanese and Mexican cuisines on corresponding days of the week, Monday through Friday. This way, their homes can have more freedom to determine specific dishes, but more guidance for the types of foods to be served on a particular evening.

Promote the power of leftovers. Encourage consumers to plan ahead for mealtime by making a dish that will last a household two to three days — often dubbed “planned overs” — thereby saving on time and alleviating the need to make additional food decisions. Most core

ingredients for favorite meals can be stored safely below 40 degrees Fahrenheit for up to four days.

Advise shoppers to pre-wash, cut, measure and store ingredients as soon as they return home from the grocery store. Many consumers have also found success mapping out a menu for the week in calendars or agendas, or posting on a visible whiteboard in the kitchen, to reduce potential stress at mealtime.

Grocery stores have launched many dinner solutions for busy customers that take the guesswork out of mealtime. Options such as click-and-collect, online grocery delivery, meal kits, ready-to-eat fare, par-baked and par-boiled goods, and an expanding selection of frozen meal ideas can be foolproof ways to get a meal on the table in minutes, if not seconds.

Team up with your store's chef or dietitian team to offer nutrition demonstrations, culinary sampling, cooking classes or dinner guides to assist shoppers in making this main meal matter.