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## Cooking for children (Recipes, more on Living main page)

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At the recent "Everything Fit and Healthy Expo" held in Essex Junction, Tammy Morin of St. Albans could have met the governor or relaxed with some yoga, but the busy mother of three was focused on a different goal.

"I came to get ideas on cooking healthy meals," Morin explained, holding her 6-month-old son in her arms while her husband pushed a stroller with their two older boys, age 2 and 5. "I know it's important, and it's something that I'm trying to do."

The hardest part of getting her family to eat healthy? "The vegetables," she replied with a grimace.

Most parents can identify with Morin's challenge. Luckily, there were plenty of cooking tips -- and even tastes -- at the Expo, including vegetables in many delicious forms.

In addition, there was a welcome message of realism delivered by registered dietitian and Massachusetts-based author Janice Newell Bissex, who was at the Expo to share recipes and ideas from "The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers," which she co-wrote with Liz Weiss.

"Don't think you have to start growing bean sprouts in your back yard," Bissex encouraged the audience at her noon cooking demonstration. "Just make one or two changes. ...You don't have to be perfect. If you can get from a C- to a B+, that's great."

Bissex -- ably assisted by her 13-year-old daughter -- whipped up a healthier version of tacos in 10 minutes while she spoke. She made no excuses for her judicious use of canned and jarred products, as well as pre-shredded cheese. If they make healthier food easier to achieve, they're OK in her book.

The made-over taco recipe adds fiber and cuts fat, she explained, by combining a can of black beans with lean ground beef, as well as using reduced-fat Cheddar. She also slashes the sodium by replacing a packet of taco seasoning with three dried spices, and she stirs in a cup of tomato



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Janice Newell Bissex demonstrates one of her healthy recipes with the help of her 13-year-old daughter, Carolyn Bissex, from her cookbook "Mom's Guide to Meal Makeovers" at the recent Everything Fit and Healthy Expo in Essex Junction.

ALISON REDLICH, Free Press

salsa for a veggie boost. Finally, Bissex said, read the label of your taco shells to avoid hydrogenated vegetable oils, which contain unhealthy trans fats.

While she cooked, Bissex rattled off a bunch of quick tips, such as replacing half of the white flour in baking recipes with whole wheat flour, and substituting three-quarters cup of canola oil for one cup of solid shortening. To wean your family off soda or sugary fruit-flavored drinks, try sparkling water mixed with 100 percent fruit juice. Any time you saute up ground beef for tomato sauce, tacos, sloppy joes or chili, she suggested, shred up a couple of carrots and add them into the pot. "They'll disappear," she promised.

"Just try adding a little bit of nutrition to everything you do for your family," Bissex said. "Any way that you can get a fruit, or vegetable, or a whole grain into your family's diet is a good thing."

Bissex is fully aware that kids can be picky and that parental time and budgets are often limited. "There are so many challenges and obstacles to healthy eating," she acknowledged. "We're all running in different directions. There's so much marketing out there, and the lure of fast food."

In a perfect world, for example, your kids would welcome whole wheat pasta with open mouths, but Bissex and Weiss, who have four children between them, do not feature whole wheat noodles in their made-over mac and cheese. "The kids wouldn't eat it," Bissex said, "and taste is No. 1."

They did find, however, that whole wheat noodles worked well in some less familiar dishes, like their Sweet and Nutty Thai Thing, modeled after Pad Thai. (See link to recipes on Living page.)

After the demonstration and talk, the audience lined up to taste the taco filling. Barbara Wurthmann of Burlington gave it a big thumbs up. "I live alone," she explained, "and I cook as little as possible." The recipe looked so simple, though, she thought she might be able to tackle it.

Sue White of Winooski also agreed that the Moms Makeover approach was sensible and realistic. She was picking up information for her daughter who has a growing family.

"I'm trying to influence her to do more healthy cooking," she confided. "This makes sense," she said. "It's moderation. Not way over on the other side. I'm probably more on the other side, but this -- it's doable for her." About the book, Web site

"The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers: Improving the Way Your Family Eats, One Meal at a Time!" by Janice Bissex and Liz Weiss. (Broadway, 2004) Paperback; 368 pages. \$15.95. [www.mealmakeovermoms.com](http://www.mealmakeovermoms.com): For recipes, tips and discussion boards, visit the authors' Web site. There are also details on how to host a "Meal Makeover Mom Cooking Party."

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