

## The Oregonian

### Give kids' meals a not-so-extreme makeover

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THE MOMS' GUIDE TO MEAL MAKEOVERS

Janice Newell Bissex and Liz Weiss Broadway Books, \$15.95, 349 pages

"I don't cook, I boil," quipped a friend recently in a moment of honesty. Parents everywhere can relate -- and are likely to gobble up every bit of quick-to-the-table wisdom in "The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers." The softcover book, by Janice Newell Bissex and Liz Weiss, both registered dietitians, reads like a friendly pep talk for once-enthusiastic home cooks.

The authors tell you they understand the weekday grind of work, school, soccer. They know you care about nutrition, that you like to eat well, but, face it, some nights all you can muster is a box of macaroni and cheese. So they offer an alternative: 120 last-minute recipes for real food that's nutritious, kid-friendly, and interesting enough for Mom and Dad to enjoy, too.

There's Orange Soup -- made with frozen butternut squash, carrots, and spices to give it zing. Smart sandwiches that sneak in veggies, such as grilled cheese with sliced tomatoes, or tuna with shredded carrots and apple, on whole-wheat bread, of course. And main dishes such as a kid-tested version of Linguine With Clam Sauce, with diced canned tomatoes rich in antioxidants, and less clam juice to lower the sodium.

My own picky eaters wouldn't buy every makeover suggestion -- sure, nuts are nutritious, but try to get a 7-year-old to eat them in cookies, let alone in tortellini. But they're certain to love the slimmed-down pasta alfredo, with a creamy sauce, lean deli ham and frozen peas -- and 11 grams of fat per serving (see accompanying recipe), and maybe even the Cheese Ravioli With Pumpkin Sauce -- a fiber- and vitamin-packed alternative to plain buttered noodles.

Because some nights are destined for box macaroni and cheese, the authors, both mothers of two, also suggest the healthiest choices in instant meals, and practical suggestions for doctoring them up.

There's a helpful Q & A section, answering cooking concerns that came up from their recipe testers -- other busy moms -- across the country.

The most useful part of the book may be the five-step meal makeover plan, where Bissex and Weiss explain how to market good nutrition to kids, and trade your job of short-order cook for the title of executive chef. You learn how to be a savvy shopper and label reader, phase in a better diet gradually, get control of portions, and establish better table manners and mealtime habits. No more "clean plate club"; instead, the wee ones can learn polite refusal with the "no thank you bite." (Have the kids take one bite to politely try the food, but don't force them to eat more than that.) It's stuff we all know intuitively, but here you get clear steps to regain control of the family dinner table.

Boilers, unite!

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