



## TASTY, EASY AND KID-FRIENDLY: HEALTHY SCHOOL NIGHT DINNERS IN A SNAP

By *Your Health Blog*

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Transition periods are challenging for our routines, and back-to-school marks a major transition time for kids and families struggling to return to their regular school year rhythms.

At [Healthier 901](#), we know preparing healthy, affordable meals can be challenging for families any night of the year (especially if you have picky eaters at your dinner table!). Rest assured that you are not alone if it's hard to resist the urge to hit the drive-thru or serve up processed, pre-packaged foods from the freezer. We also know that a healthy diet makes a *huge* positive difference for kids, from their brain development and muscle strength to their academic performance and ability to fend off diseases.

“Nutritious dinners are a big deal for children because healthy ingredients—especially lean meats, whole fruits and veggies—help them grow and develop in vital ways,” says Leslie Ely, RD, LDN, CEDRD, nutrition therapy lead at Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare. “Among other things, a healthy diet helps children develop a strong immune system, supports the growth of strong bones and muscles, benefits the digestive system and makes it easier to continue opting for healthy choices in the long run.”

Serving up a nutritious meal at night also helps children establish healthy eating habits early in life, which can play a big part in preventing chronic diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure in adulthood—two diseases that affect more than 1 in 3 people living in the Mid-South. And, for families who aren't accustomed to cooking at home, subbing in a healthy, homemade meal just one or two nights a week can go a long way toward supporting your loved ones' health and creating new habits as a family.

To help take the guesswork (and the stress work!) out of the healthy cooking process, we've pulled together a handful of our favorite, kid-friendly recipes that are nutritious, delicious *and* easy to prepare. With as few as five ingredients per dish, these recipes are also easy on the bank account.

**Pro tip:** Need help finding fresh foods at affordable prices? Check out this list of [Memphis-area farmers markets](#), some of which are open all year long. Our partners at [Church Health](#) also put together this up-to-date list of [resources for families experiencing food insecurity](#).

Read on to scope out our recommended recipes for air fryer crispy chicken wings, heart-healthy sweet and sour meatballs, sheet-pan tomato soup (perfect for fall) and our crowd-pleasing, five-ingredient pesto chicken and veggies. And if these recipes leave you hungry for more, you can download a whole week's worth of [healthy dinner ideas](#) courtesy of Healthier 901. Don't forget that the Healthier 901 app also provides you with access to awesome planning tools, such as a free food tracker and guided health journeys (also free!) around nutrition, mobility, positivity and more.

## Healthy Dinner Ideas

If you haven't already, [join the Healthier 901 movement](#) today and dig into a boatload of complimentary community resources to go with these delicious and nutritious dinner ideas:

### Air Fryer Crispy Chicken Wings

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Cook Time:** 18 minutes

#### Ingredients

- 2 lbs. chicken wings (flats and drums), defrosted if cooking from frozen
- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- *Optional: sugar-free sauce (ranch, buffalo, barbecue, etc.)*

#### Instructions

1. Pat wings completely dry.
2. Place wings in a bowl or bag and add oil, seasonings/spices.
3. Toss wings in oil and spice mixture to coat the chicken thoroughly.
4. Set the air fryer to 410° F and add wings in a single layer to the air fryer (wings should not touch).
5. Cook wings for 10 minutes. Flip.
6. Cook another 8 minutes or until internal temp reaches 165° F.
7. Serve plain or with your favorite sugar-free dipping sauce.



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## Healthy Sweet and Sour Meatballs

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Cook Time:** 20 minutes

### Ingredients

#### Meatballs

- 1 lb. extra lean ground beef or ground turkey
- 1 cup plain panko breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- fresh cracked pepper

#### Sauce

- 1 cup ketchup (low-sugar, low-sodium)
- 1/2 cup coconut sugar
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/4 cup low-sodium soy sauce
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

### Instructions

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine ground meat, egg, breadcrumbs, kosher salt and pepper.
2. Mix thoroughly and form into 24 equal-sized meatballs.
3. Next, prepare the sauce by pouring the ketchup, coconut sugar, water, soy sauce and apple cider vinegar into a pot.
4. Whisk ingredients together and bring the liquid to a slow boil.
5. Drop the meatballs into the pot and cook them in the sauce over medium heat for 15-20 minutes, or until the meatballs are fully cooked and the sauce becomes thick and syrupy.

## Sheet-Pan Tomato Soup (*vegan*)

**Prep Time:** 15 mins

**Cook Time:** 30 mins

**Servings:** 4

### Ingredients

- 4 pints cherry tomatoes
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided
- ½ teaspoon pepper, divided
- 1-2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried, plus more for garnish

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Spread tomatoes, onion and garlic in an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet.
3. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper; toss to coat.
4. Roast until the tomatoes burst and the onion is very soft (20-25 minutes).
5. Carefully transfer the tomatoes, onions and garlic to a blender.
6. Add sugar to taste, thyme and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper.
7. Blend, scraping down the sides as necessary, until very smooth (1-2 minutes). **Note:** Use caution when pureeing hot liquids.
8. Garnish with more fresh thyme, if desired.

## 5-Ingredient Pesto Chicken and Veggies

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cook Time:** 30-45 minutes

*Optional: Marinate chicken and veggies for at least 1 hour or overnight for more flavor.*

## **Ingredients**

- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- drizzle avocado oil
- 2 heaping tablespoons pesto (sugar-free)
- 4 cups carrots, peeled and sliced into coins
- 12 oz broccoli florets
- *Optional: salt and pepper to taste*
- *Optional: lemon, parmesan cheese, nutritional yeast*

## **Instructions**

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Peel carrots and cut them into round coins.
3. Pat chicken thighs dry and place them in an oven-safe baking dish.
4. Arrange carrots and broccoli in a baking dish around raw chicken thighs.
5. Drizzle all with avocado oil and lightly sprinkle with salt and pepper.
6. Add the pesto and massage it into the chicken.
7. Bake chicken and vegetables uncovered for 30 minutes or until the internal temperature of the chicken reaches 165° F.
8. Take chicken out of the baking dish to rest (so it doesn't keep cooking).
9. Pour over juices to serve.
10. *Optional: Sprinkle with parmesan cheese, lemon or nutritional yeast (vegan)*

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