

Mealtime on Fatigue Days



As a parent, it's a wonderful feeling when you work hard on an elaborate meal—and when you sit down as a family, everyone loves it, praising and expressing their appreciation of your culinary mastery.

Okay, yeah, that never really happens. Most days, all we can hope for is to get a decent meal on the table, get everyone to sit at said table together with little to no whining—and bonus points if your kids eat their vegetables with no complaints.

There are many dinnertime-battles we face daily as parents. When you're a parent living with multiple sclerosis, there are extra battles—including fatigue. Some days, it's difficult to muster the energy to even **sit** at the table, let alone prepare a meal for your family.

Over the years I've discovered some go-to ideas and recipes that work for my family. My disclaimer: My husband is an excellent cook and makes a lot of our meals. Also, my kids are getting older now and are able to help a lot more. But I do cook a lot, too, and I remember the days when the kids were younger and how hard it can be. I hope some of my tips can help.

Slow Cooker

While fatigue often strikes without warning, sometimes you know in advance that you're going to have a long, demanding day, leaving you with no energy for dinner. On those days, the slow cooker is your best friend—particularly if you can find a recipe that doesn't involve a lot of prep. One idea is slow cooker chicken:

- Place frozen chicken breasts in with a half-cup of water or broth plus any spices (my easy go-tos are salt, pepper and garlic powder); cook for 8 hours on low. Serve with BBQ sauce (or your favorite sauce).
- Pop a bag of steam-in-the-bag veggies in the microwave for a side dish

Breakfast for Dinner

For the days where fatigue roars its ugly head without warning, try breakfast for dinner. The novelty of having breakfast in the evening makes it fun, and the only cooking involved is using the toaster:

- Cereal and milk
- Toast “buffet”: toast with the option of butter, jam or honey
- Set out some bananas

Pizza Bagels

At the risk of sounding like an infomercial, I can’t believe how much my kids loved this easy, last-minute meal idea:

- Toast a bagel
- Spread marinara sauce or butter/butter substitute on each side.
- Add toppings of choice—we use pepperoni and cheese (dairy-free for my allergy kiddo)
- Pop in the microwave for 30 seconds—longer if needed for the cheese to melt
- Tip: You don’t have to toast the bagel, and you can actually use bread or hamburger buns instead if you want

Have a “Picnic”

This is another one that’s fun because it’ll feel like an adventure to your kids. The menu can include:

- Easy sandwiches (like PB&J, ham and cheese, etc.)
- Apples or applesauce pouches
- Chips, popcorn or pretzels
- Juice boxes

Have your kids spread a blanket on the living floor, turn on Netflix and watch a movie while you curl up on the couch.

Snack Buffet

Set out a bunch of different foods your kids can grab themselves and fill their plates, buffet-style, such as mini-meats and crackers to make tiny sandwiches. Call it a “Snack Buffet” and your kids will think it’s the coolest. Possibilities:

- Crackers
- Salami or pepperoni
- Cheese sticks
- Popcorn
- Apples or applesauce
- Go-gurt
- Bananas
- Cereal
- Pretzels
- Rice cakes
- Granola bars

Involve Your Kids (if Possible)

Again, I realize I'm speaking as a mom whose kids are older, so this likely won't work if your kiddos are very young. But if your kids **are** able to help out, here are some ideas:

- Older kids can boil pasta for spaghetti; make mac and cheese; or cook pizzas or other pre-prepared foods in the oven, all while you sit and supervise
- Younger kids can pour drinks or cereal, make sandwiches, or pop something in the microwave
- Sometimes it helps to play restaurant to make it a fun game—have them make a menu and set the table (my 8-year-old loves to drape a towel over his arm and pretend he's a server)

Delivery

Some days, you just need to order in. Don't feel guilty—do what is best for you and your family!

Remember: When it comes to healthy eating, we do the best we can. If your kids skip the vegetables once in a while because you don't have the energy to argue that day, it's OK. Try again tomorrow.

Also remember that every family is different; what works for one family doesn't work for another. So if your mealtime doesn't look like the traditional "family meal" experience, that's OK. Your kids will be just fine, and you're doing a great job.