

healing meals

Helping families in treatment for cancer

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HEARTY AND HEARTFELT Yvonne Cortez and her daughter Emily, a brain cancer patient, with HealthBarn Foundation Director Stacey Antine. Emily and her mom have benefitted from Healing Meals.

Grandma knew the healing power of food when she plied us with chicken soup. And neighbors have long taken on the task of providing meals of solace or sustenance to friends in the midst of life-changing events. So it's no surprise that the same heartfelt, healthful assistance is behind Healing Meals, the new Bergen County initiative created by the HealthBarn Foundation.

"It's a wonderful collaboration of partners," director Stacey Antine says, "who provide nutritious meals for children and families undergoing treatment for cancer and serious blood disorders and their families." The meals are distributed through Tomorrows Children's Fund at Hackensack University Medical Center.

How to help?

For donations, visit healthbarnfoundation.org.

Anyone interested in cooking meals can email info@healthbarnfoundation.org.

Collaboration is key. "The recipes are prepared by culinary student volunteers from the Bergen County Academies' Skills USA Club," Antine says. The cooking takes place at the commercial kitchen of Meals with a Mission in Garfield. And the ingredients? Organic and natural ingredients are donated by Whole Foods Markets in Bergen County and by Abma's Farm in Wyckoff.

"As families leave treatment," Antine says, "the social workers make the meals available."

Chicken Fiesta Fajitas

One of the meals provided to families in treatment is this delicious chicken fajita recipe.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
 ¼ teaspoon sea salt
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 1½ pounds skinless, boneless chicken breasts
 1 medium green bell pepper
 1 medium red bell pepper
 1 large sweet onion, such as Vidalia
 2 tablespoons canola oil
 1 clove garlic, minced
 Juice of 2 limes
 12 (6-inch) corn tortillas, warmed

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease baking sheet.

In bowl, combine cinnamon, salt and black pepper. Add chicken to bowl with seasonings and toss to coat evenly.

Place chicken on prepared baking sheet. Bake chicken 25 to 30 minutes or until no longer pink. Cool slightly, then pull into shreds with two forks.

Meanwhile, slice green and red peppers lengthwise into thin slices. Cut onion in half, then cut each half into thin slices. In large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add peppers and onions and cook 7 to 10 minutes or until tender or crisp, stirring occasionally. Stir in garlic; cook 30 seconds.

Add chicken and lime juice to skillet with peppers; heat through.

Spoon chicken mixture into serving bowl. Place tortillas on plates. Let everyone make his or her own fajitas.

The Healing Meals are in a freezer bag for transportation home and include heating instructions and nutrition analysis. The recipes, meanwhile, have already been kid-tested. They are culled from Antine's *Appetite for Life* cookbook.

Inspiration for Healing Meals, meanwhile, came from Antine's personal experience.

"Last year," she says, "a family member was diagnosed with cancer and I learned first-hand the challenges of eating healthy while managing everything else in treatment." ❖