



Family Information

Family Style Dining

Eating Together

The Family Meal

Sitting down for an evening meal as a family used to be commonplace. In the past decade, the occurrence of the family meal has drastically declined, which researchers believe is a result of an increase of dual-income families as well as our fast-paced society. Many times, dinner is a quick drive to a fast food restaurant with children eating their meals in the car seat. If dinner does occur at home, statistics show that the majority of families do not eat at the same time, the same food, or even in the same room! Many parents cite the reason of 'too busy' as the inability to plan, cook, and sit down for a meal. But, with recent research showing the importance of coming together as a family, the trend may be turning back. Family meals can actually offer some defense to the rapid rate of childhood obesity. One reason is meals cooked at home tend to be more nutritious. Research also shows that children who participate in family meals are more likely to make better food choices which promotes healthier eating patterns and lifestyles. When parents are able to

role model healthy practices and attitudes towards food with their children, the risk for eating disorders and unhealthy body images declines as well. In addition to the nutritional benefits, family meals can often be a wonderful time to talk and catch up with each other. They allow the family time to reconnect and give children a sense of

belonging and security. Researchers believe this is why teenagers who participate in family meals are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and use illegal drugs.



Scheduling Family Meals

How do you transition from a family-on-the-go to a family who shares meal time? Here are some ideas to help.

***Plan wisely.** Choose days or times that work best for your family. Family meals might be dinner on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays, breakfast on Saturdays, and brunch on Sundays. Be flexible as sports and after school activities evolve. The family meal could also be the

family snack if your family has too many obligations and activities. Keep in mind, anytime is better than no time and it counts as a family meal if you are eating it together.

***Prepare appropriately.** With younger children, the question is not only what to cook but also how to occupy them while the meal is being prepared. Do some brainstorming and figure out what works for your child. Your child's occupancy in a high chair or exersaucer may keep you company in the kitchen, or trading off times with a neighbor so you cook while she entertains the children and vice versa. Older children can easily occupy themselves, but why not get them involved in the preparation? It may

take a bit more time, as well as patience and clean-up, but the memories and experience will be well worth it.

***Choose wisely.** Allow the family to have input on the meals served as well as the grocery list. This is another wonderful time to role model healthy food choices with your children, such as helping them find cereals and snacks that not only taste good but are also healthy. By giving children the respect and responsibility of choosing different foods, they will be more likely to try new foods.

Interesting Facts:

- ⊗ Meals eaten with family consist of about fifty percent more fruits and vegetables than meals consumed alone.
- ⊗ Forty percent less soda is consumed at family meals.
- ⊗ The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average American family spends more than \$2000 per year on dinners away from home and ten percent of those dinners come from fast food restaurants.
- ⊗ More than half of the dinners eaten by overweight American children are consumed in front of the television.

Want more tips and ideas for family meals?

Try these websites:

www.mealsmatter.org

www.minutemeals.com

www.activityvillage.co.uk/family_recipes.htm

www.epicurious.com/cooking/everyday/family/