



Do Family Meals Still Matter?

Surveys show that the majority of parents think family meals are important, but they aren't having them as often as they'd like. **Why are fewer families eating regular family meals than in years past?** Some people say they do not have the time or the energy to prepare a family meal. Other reasons given are:

- Both parents working
- Conflicting schedules
- Long work hours
- Many meetings, and kids' practices for sports and music...
- Parents don't know how to cook

What happens instead of sitting down together for a family meal?

- Families eat microwave dinners often in front of the TV.
- Fast foods and drive-thru eating.
- Fill up on snack foods.
- Family members grab what they want, and eat when and where they want.



Picnics are a Great Way to have a Family Meal!

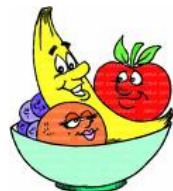
Do family meals really matter? Yes, they do! Studies show that mealtime conversation around the dinner table helps increase a child's vocabulary and this leads to better readers. Better readers do better in all subjects. Family meals help to strengthen families because it is a time for dialogue and sharing. They encourage a sense of belonging. Family meals help improve family communication. "*What was your favorite part of the day?*" is a question that can start the table talk. Mealtime is a perfect time for children to learn social skills, manners, and how to have pleasant conversations. Parents need to set a good example. Use the family meal time to teach children to take turns and be good listeners. Children learn to eat by watching others eat.

At meal time, parents and others can model healthy eating. When families eat together, families eat better. Family meals can promote healthier food choices. *See page two for tips on bringing back the family meal.*



Building Blocks to Good Health

- ☺ French Fries are the most common vegetable consumed by toddlers, with 25% of all toddlers having fries everyday! This is a worry! Serve less fried and fatty foods. Use fats and oils sparingly.
- ☺ Eat family meals regularly. Start the fall season on the right foot by eating together on **Family Day. It's the fourth Monday in September** and a day to eat dinner with your children! Let this be a reminder to eat together often. Read about the benefits in this issue!
- ☺ Fruits and Veggies— More Matters™! They are naturally low in calories and loaded with vitamins and minerals,
- ☺ Use the **Nutrition Facts Label** to help you make healthy food choices. Nutrients to get less of are fat, especially saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, and sodium, and get enough of dietary fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals.



Parent Question Box



Q. My preschooler is extremely hungry in the late afternoon before dinner time. What kind of snacks can I offer her instead of chips and cookies?

A. Back-to-School A+ Smart Snacks:

Many children need a snack between lunch and dinner because they are hungry. Make it a healthy snack. Use this chance to supplement your child's diet. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Chunks of fresh fruit covered with yogurt
- Apple slices spread with peanut butter
- Carrots dipped in peanut butter or cottage cheese
- Tortilla with low fat cream cheese and sliced
- veggies rolled up and sliced.
- Applesauce



- Use a cookie cutter to cut cheese, veggies, and sandwiches into fun shapes.



Parenting Place

How can you bring back family mealtimes? These tips may help:

1. Make mealtimes a priority. To make mealtime work, it has to be a priority for everyone. If everyone can't make it for dinner, then eat breakfast together.

2. Have a plan. Know everyone's schedule; write

down a menu; keep foods on hand that can be easily prepared, shop ahead of time, use convenience foods wisely. For example, packaged salads save time, but they cost more. The whole family needs to be involved in getting the meal on the table. Share the responsibility. Pitch in and help. Even little ones can set out the napkins or spoons.

3. Build a positive feeling at the table. Focus on each other. Turn off the TV, phones, and radio so there are no distractions. Use this time to come together.



September is Food Safety Month!

Always wash your hands before eating and cooking. Keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold. Check out <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/september.html> for more information.



Family Physical Activity Corner

- ★ Toss a ball with family members. Give each person a chance to choose a favorite game.
- ★ At TV commercials, use the time for an activity break, like 10 toe touches, 10 stretching arms to the sky, marching in place, or play "Simon Says."
- ★ **Set a good example.** Let children see you eating healthy food and being active. Talk about becoming strong and healthy, rather than about "being thin" or "losing weight."

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