



WELLNESS WISE

NUTRITIONAL TIPS FOR PARENTS

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Vol. 1. No. 7



FAMILY MEALS

Make the Most out of Family Mealtimes

Parenting and health experts agree that family mealtimes can have important, long-lasting benefits. Here are five reasons to make mealtime a priority in your home:



- Eating together is one important way to build a sense of family unity.
- To keep your child from getting into trouble, family mealtimes are a great place to start. The more often that families eat together, the less likely teenagers are to become depressed, use drugs and alcohol, develop eating disorders or get pregnant.
- Mealtime conversations also translate into success at school. As children listen to adults talk, they learn important language skills, such as new vocabulary and putting words into sentences. These skills help children do better in the classroom and on tests.
- What you put on the table is also important. Children who have more family meals get more of the nutrient-rich foods that build strong bodies and smart brains: more lean meats, fruits, veggies, and milk; fewer fried foods and soft drinks.
- Smart eating habits help children grow up with a healthy weight, avoiding problems like being seriously overweight or developing an eating disorder. During family meals, you can model positive, healthy habits for your children.

Source: *Enriching Family Mealtimes toolkit*,
www.school-wellness.org

FAMILY MEALTIMES

Conversations

Sharing a meal as a family provides stability, encourages conversation, relieves stress and is just plain fun. So get talking around the table.

- Quality conversations happen when mealtimes are as calm as possible, with minimal distractions. Turn off the TV and radio, and let the answering machine take calls while you enjoy each other's company.
- Mealtimes are wonderful times to share funny stories, discuss the happenings of the day and talk about current events.
- Even young children want to be a part of family mealtime conversations. Make a conscious effort to engage everyone, being patient with those who take longer to express themselves and seek out opinions of those who tend to be quieter.
- Tired of conversations that fall flat after a minute or two? Conversation starter cards may be just what your family needs to keep things lively at the table. Download free conversation starters at www.school-wellness.org.

PARENT POINTER

- Make family dinners at home even more special with a fun centerpiece that sets the tone for the meal – whether it's flowers, or a child's recent art project.
- Get kids involved in planning meals. Even young children can pick a main dish (like pasta or tacos), a vegetable, and a fruit for dessert.
- Create a calendar with dinner themes for one night of the week. Serve make-your-own pizzas on Italian night, steak fajitas for a mini-"fiesta" and stir-fry to create an Asian-inspired meal.



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