

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.

BRIGHT, STRONG, HEALTHY, HAPPY CHILDREN START AT YOUR DINING TABLE



by Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD, CDN

Every parents' goal is to do whatever it takes to help their children grow up smart, happy, healthy and strong. Sitting down to family meals as frequently as possible is a step in the right direction.

The positive impact of family mealtime has been demonstrated for children of all ages in scientific research. Better academic performance, healthier eating behaviors, tightly-bonded relationships to parents and siblings, better ability to resist negative peer pressure and resilience — all resulting from sharing meals together on a regular basis.

Consider these facts:

- 71% of children say they get information about how to be healthy from their mother; 43% from their father.
- 19% of teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week report that there is a great deal of tension or stress between family members, compared to 7% of teens who have at least five family dinners per week.
- More mealtime at home was the single strongest factor in better achievement scores and fewer behavioral problems in children all ages.
- More meals at home also resulted in less obesity.

- Because feeding is the most basic animal form of caring, sharing meals is central to family bonding.
- Through the mini lessons of table manners, children learn to share and think of others. By saying “please” and “thank you,” children learn that their tablemates deserve respect.
- More than a decade of research by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University has found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less like they are to smoke, drink or use drugs.

With a little effort, your family can be healthier and more bonded.

Consider these five tips for sharing meals together more often:

- 1 Get the family together and discuss the benefits of family meals.
- 2 Identify obstacles to mealtime. Coordinating schedules can be tough, but it can be done.
- 3 Set the expectation that family members will gather at specific times for mealtime. These dates should be considered as important as soccer practice, hair appointments, club meetings, etc.

- 4 Turn off the television. People who watch television while eating tend to tune out natural hunger and satiety cues, which encourages overeating.
- 5 Serve a variety of foods for a variety of tastes. Work together to come up with menus.



Resources:
Book - The Surprising Power of Family Meals, by Miriam Wein
<http://www.poweroffamilymeals.com/default.aspx>
<http://family.samhsa.gov/get/mealtime.aspx>
<http://family-dinners-are-important>