

## The Family Meal

A key component of health, happiness and stability is the family meal. Recent research shows that the family meal promotes family bonding and healthier habits among children: kids who regularly eat meals with their parents consume more fruits and vegetables than those who do not, and they are less likely to consume junk food or use drugs. Consider having a sit-down meal with your family as often as possible.

### Schedule a Time and Place

Starting a new family meal routine? If not everyone can make it to dinner, try planning a family breakfast, lunch or after-school snack; a few meals a week are better than none. Create a clear dining space that is free of distractions like the TV and allows family members to see and speak to one another.

### Don't Stress, Enjoy

A central purpose of the family meal is to allow you and your family members to enjoy each other's company in a welcoming, relaxed environment. Make the family meal a positive experience by maintaining light and fun conversation, encouraging sharing and allowing everyone the chance to speak. How the day went, activity planning, and giving thanks are just a few possible dinner topics.

### Involve Everyone

Creating a meal together can be just as important as eating it together. Older family members can contribute by shopping for groceries or preparing vegetables. Younger children can help by setting the table, pouring drinks or tossing the salad. Everyone can participate in the clean-up process.

### Make it Healthy, Simple and Quick

Family meals do not have to be elaborate to be meaningful. Simple meals can be delicious, bring kids to the table and become family favorites. To save cooking time, serve raw or steamed veggies as a side dish. Cook larger portions of dishes so they can be served as leftovers later in the week. Some examples of low cost and low prep foods include canned tuna or chicken, fruit salad, beans and cold sandwiches.

### Mix it Up

To add variety to the family meal, you can picnic outside or design the meal around a theme or holiday. Seek suggestions from family members—maybe you can create new traditions within your family for years to come!

### Additional Information

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