

Extension

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Sharing Family Meals

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Mealtime is more than just eating. It is an important time in the life of your child. Mealtime can be a special time for the family to talk and listen to each other. Sharing food in a pleasant, social environment benefits families in many ways. It feeds the body, mind, and soul.

Mealtime is one way for families to stay connected. Shared meals provide family members the feeling of belonging. Family mealtime is a chance for everyone to be together.

Family meals can teach children about eating healthy. Studies show that people eat balanced meals when they eat with family. They also eat a variety of food. This is necessary to get all the nutrients that our bodies need every day.

Families are more likely to eat a nutritious meal when most or all of the family eats together. Children who eat with their families are less likely to snack on unhealthy foods. They frequently have healthier eating habits than those children who do not eat with their families. Children are more likely to eat foods such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.

It is best to eat around a table. It's easier to talk and share ideas. During mealtime, turn off the TV and do not answer the phone. This is a time to communicate thoughts and build relationships with your family. Making mealtime pleasant can be a struggle. Keep conversations easy, this is not a time for nagging, criticizing, or complaining. Focus on the positive.

Parents, remember this is the time to be a good role model. Children learn by watching how other people eat. Adults should demonstrate good table manners as well.

Encourage all family members to help from food preparation through clean-up. Involve family with tasks such as setting the table, tearing lettuce for a salad, scrubbing potatoes or placing bread in a basket. Helping with family meals makes your child feel an important part of your family. Children usually eat better if they have helped prepare the food in some sort of way.



Make mealtime a priority. Family meals do not have to be elaborate. Try to enjoy at least one family meal together each week. Work up to more meals together from there. Let family members know that mealtime is a family occasion.

Let's Talk:

When parents talk to their children, they are a role model while they are sharing their values. At the family meal, ask questions that can support a conversation, such as:

- What was the most interesting thing that happened to you today?
- What shall we plan to do this weekend?
- If you could spend one day as an animal, which one would you choose to be?
- What should we eat tomorrow for supper?
- What kinds of food do we need to eat to stay healthy?
- What did you eat at snack time?
- Who did you play with today; what did you play?
- Tell me about a story you read today?
- Start a funny story. For example, "Once upon a time there was a little girl who loved ponies." Have everyone add a few sentences to the story.



Recipe for Health:

Creamy Fettuccine with Vegetables

- 1 cup carrots, sliced
- 1 cup broccoli flowerets
- 1 cup zucchini, sliced
- 1 cup green beans, cut in half
- 8 ounces fettuccine pasta

Sauce:

- 1 ½ cup low-fat (1%) cottage cheese
- 2 tsp. basil
- ½ cup skim milk
- ¼ cup chopped parsley

Steam carrots, broccoli, zucchini, and green beans until tender. Put in serving bowl to cool. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain, and set aside. Using blender or food processor, puree cottage cheese until smooth. Blend skim milk, basil and parsley with cottage cheese. Combine vegetables and pasta. Pour sauce over vegetables and pasta, mix until thoroughly coated. Serves 6 people.

Source: *Que Bueno 5 a Day Cookbook*, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, pg. 16.