

Extension

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Newsletter

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Creating an Enjoyable Meal Time Experience

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Family meal time is hard to include in our daily lives. One of the major barriers to having family meals is difficulty scheduling a time that everyone can be present. However, family meals provide an opportunity for family members to come together and strengthen ties.

Family mealtime is much more than something good to eat! It is valuable in that it helps your family make stronger bonds. It nourishes the body, mind, and soul. Mealtime can be your family's time for sharing good food, laughter, and love. Family meals make children feel like they belong and are loved. You may not be able to eat together every day. But make it a goal to have family meals at least four times per week.



Children who eat with their families develop healthy eating habits, like eating a variety of foods from all food groups. It also means eating fewer foods with added sugar, salt, and solid fat.

Children learn from watching you. Set a good example. If you eat fruits and vegetables, children will too. If children see you try new foods, they will be encouraged to try new foods too.

Many children need to be offered a new food several times before they will try it. Try offering new foods prepared in different ways. When children taste new foods, reward them with praise instead of treats.

Learn about parent and child roles. Allow children to pick what to eat and serve themselves from the meals you provide. When children decide how much food to eat they begin to learn the right portion size for their bodies. This will help reduce mealtime power struggles and arguments about eating. Your job is to offer the healthy food choices.

Finally, slow down, relax and enjoy each other's company at meal time. When your family eats a relaxed, healthy meal together, everyone benefits. The best benefit is that children learn to eat healthy now and for a life time.

How can you make family meals a priority in your household?

- Think about when your family could eat together during the week; plan the days and times to eat together. It can be breakfast, lunch, dinner or even a snack time.
- Keep it simple. Focus on the importance of being together as a family. Meals don't have to be fancy.
- Think of quick and healthy meals and snacks your family likes.
- Remove distractions by turning off the television or computer. Avoid talking on the phone or texting.
- Involve the children. Encourage them to help you prepare, serve, and clean up after a meal. Children generally are more interested in eating the food they helped prepare.

Let's Talk

Make family mealtime pleasant. Avoid meal time battles. Try conversation starters to get your family talking and enjoying each other. Have questions for everyone to answer, for example:

- What made you feel really happy today?
- What did you have to eat at lunch today?
- What's your favorite veggie? Why?
- Tell me one thing you learned today.
- What made you laugh today?
- What is your favorite food tonight? Where do you think this food was made/grown/raised?
- What new food did you try today? Where did you eat it? How did it taste?
- What was the best part of your day?

Recipe for Health: Chicken Vegetable Soup with Kale 3 Servings

Ingredients:

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- ½ cup onion (chopped)
- ½ cup carrot (chopped)
- ½ cup celery (chopped)
- 1 teaspoon thyme (ground)
- 2 garlic cloves (minced)
- 2 cups water (or chicken broth)
- ¾ cup tomatoes (diced)
- 1 cup chicken, cooked, skinned and cubed
- ½ cup brown rice, cooked
- 1 cup kale (chopped, about one large leaf)



Directions:

1. Heat oil in a medium sauce pan. Add onion, carrot and celery. Sauté until vegetables are tender, about 5-8 minutes.
2. Add thyme and garlic. Sauté for one more minute.
3. Add water or broth, tomatoes, cooked rice, chicken and kale.
4. Simmer for 10 minutes.

Recipe from: <http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/chicken-vegetable-soup-kale>