



New Jersey WIC Women, Infants and Children

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Family Meals



The Importance of Family Meals

Studies show children who experience family mealtime have fewer behavior problems, do better in school, eat healthier meals, have better self-esteem, and are less likely to use drugs and alcohol^{1,2}. This newsletter is intended to help busy parents and caregivers understand the importance of family meals and subsequently, how to make the process of serving a family meal easier.

Gather 'Round the Table

LiveScience.com reports that 25% of total calories in the American diet comes from snacks³. Access to snack food, fast food and processed foods have minimized the need and even the desire for family meals. As a result, consumers (*i.e.* adults and children) are simultaneously over-nourished and malnourished. Just 59% of families report eating dinner together at least five times a week². Little do they know that both parents and children benefit greatly when sitting around the table for mealtime.

Routinely serving family meals correlates with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, along with the adoption of healthier eating habits, in general. According to Sarah Klein at Health.com if you have a demanding job, finding time to eat with your family may actually leave you feeling less stressed². Furthermore, evidence suggests that children who communicate with their parents during family meals show fewer signs of depression and anxiety⁴.



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Children who are well-fed will always be well-read

Stephen Ritz

Family meals require a little extra time and preparation. Here are a few suggestions to make that process a little easier.

Start Simple with MyPlate⁵:



- Serve fruit, fresh or dried with every meal.
- Add a new vegetable to a different meal each day. Serve with a low-fat dip or hummus.
- Sneak whole grain pasta into a pasta salad.
- Pop a bag of low-fat or fat-free popcorn for a healthier snack.
- Whole grain cereal can be enjoyed as a healthy snack.
- Make dinner once and serve it twice. Roast a larger cut of lean meat for two meals.
- Canned salmon, tuna, or crab and frozen fish is quick and easy to prepare.
- Use low-fat or fat-free yogurt in smoothies and mix with fruit.
- Split the sweet treats and share with a family member or friend.
- Make water your go-to drink.
- Serve low-fat or fat-free milk.

Family Meal How-To Guide

Dinner does not have to be an elaborate four-course meal. Try the following hacks:

- Pick up a rotisserie chicken and a bagged salad.
- Brown ground turkey, heat up black beans and crisp some tortillas in the oven for an easy take on Taco Tuesday.
- Make breakfast for dinner.
- The family meal does not have to be dinnertime. Gather 'round for breakfast if that is the time when you are home together.
- Make time for a long leisurely brunch on the weekend.
- Be sure to recruit your kids at any age to help with cooking.
- No need to serve separate meals to everyone. Serve your child the same healthy food you eat.
- Make family mealtime an electronic-free zone.



References

1. Growing a Healthy Child. <http://njwiconline.org/html/information.cfm>.
2. Klein, S. 8 reasons to make time for family dinner (Oct 2011) CNN <https://www.cnn.com/2011/10/25/living/family-dinner-h/index.html>.
3. Yoquinto, L. 25% of Calories Now Come from Snacks. June 2011. <https://www.livescience.com/14769-snacking-calories-increase.html>.
4. Thayer, B. Family Meals: How Eating Together Boosts Health. Sept 2018. <https://www.henryford.com/blog/2018/09/family-meals-how-eating-together-boosts-health>.
5. Start simple with MyPlate. <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/start-simple-myplate>.

We hope this guidance was helpful. For more tips on family meals check out all the tools at MyPlate, MyWins for Families at <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/browse-by-audience/view-all-audiences/families>



Every Child Deserves a Healthy Start



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