

KEYS TO BETTER HEALTH™

National Family Meals Month®

Today's families seem to be busier than ever! Between work, school, sports, and social events, making time to sit down for a family meal can be a challenge. Research, however, shows that it is well worth it. Regular family meals may help your children and teenagers perform better in school and may lower the chances that they will use drugs or alcohol¹. Also, families who frequently eat together at home tend to consume healthier foods and fewer calories², have lower rates of obesity³, and spend less money on food. September is National Family Meals month® - an event dedicated to emphasizing the benefits of eating together as a family. Below are some tips that can help you work more family meals into your busy life.

1. Start with small goals.

If your family rarely sits down for meals at home, start with just one meal a week. Set a specific day and time, and make sure everyone in the family puts it on their calendars. Once that meal becomes part of your weekly routine, it will be easier to start incorporating more family meals throughout the week. If you already eat dinner together often, begin a Saturday morning breakfast or Sunday lunch tradition.



2. Streamline meal prep.

Cooking dinner every night of an already hectic week can seem daunting. Try making a big batch of soup or a couple of casseroles on the weekend and then heating them up throughout the week. At the supermarket, look for ingredients like pre-cut veggies or refrigerated pizza dough that make it easy to throw together a simple meal. The internet is also a great resource! Many websites are filled with recipe ideas that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less⁴.

3. Get everyone involved.

Sharing the responsibilities of cooking and clean-up helps make family meals more enjoyable for everyone. Younger kids can do simple tasks such as sprinkling seasoning, stirring, or rinsing veggies. With a little guidance, older children can learn to take the lead in planning and cooking one or two meals a week. Everyone can help with setting the table and cleaning up. Children who help in the kitchen not only learn valuable life skills, but may also be more willing to try the food they have helped prepare⁴.

Sources:

1. 8 Reasons to Make Time for Family Dinner. Health Magazine website. <http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20339151.00.html/view-all> Accessed April 11, 2017.
2. Study Suggests Home Cooking is a Main Ingredient in Healthier Diet. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health website. <https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-a-livable-future/news-room/News-Releases/2014/Study-Suggests-Home-Cooking-Main-Ingredient-in-Healthier-Diet.html>. Updated November 17, 2014. Accessed April 11, 2017.
3. Cooking family meals, skipping TV during those meals linked to lower odds of obesity. Science Daily website. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170323183130.htm> Updated March 23, 2017. Accessed April 11, 2017.
4. The Family Dinner Project FAQ. The Family Dinner Project website. <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/> Accessed April 11, 2017.

