

"From the Mouth of Babes"



A middle school aged boy told me what he liked and didn't like about his family. Interestingly, he liked the family dinners *they used to have*. He disliked that they no longer had those family dinners. Even as a middle school boy, he missed family dinners. Family dinners provided him the time he desired to slow down, talk, and connect with his whole family. I have to admit, I was somewhat surprised to hear a middle-school-aged child talking about missing family dinners. Nonetheless, he made an excellent observation. Family dinners provide time to reconnect and bond with our families. They are a time to relax, tell stories, and talk about our daily lives, laugh, and even make future plans.

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The Special Ingredient for Healthy Families

**Eating Together to Stay
Together**



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The Family Meal Plan to Healthier Families

Research Suggests...

...Regular family meals help reduce the rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and depression in adolescents. ...Families that enjoy regular family meals see their children attain higher grade-point averages.

..."Dinner conversation" boosts vocabulary more than reading does!

...The stories of personal victories, perseverance, fun moments, and family times help build a child's resilience and confidence.

As you can see, family meals offer a smorgasbord of benefits for families and their children. So, if you want your family to grow more intimate...if you want your children to grow up happy...if you want your children to grow up physically and emotionally healthy...if you want your children to have a higher grade-point average, set aside the time to enjoy regular family meals. Here are a few tips to help you plan your family meal time:



Include Your Whole Family in the Meal Process

The family meal process includes making the menu, preparing the meal, setting the table, and cleaning up afterwards. Include the whole family in these activities. Make the menu together. One day a week, allow a different family member to pick their favorite food items for a meal. Encourage the whole family to help clear the table, load the dishwasher, wash the dishes...and make it fun with conversation and laughter. Come up with your own creative ways to include the whole family in the family meal process.

Enjoy Conversation While You Eat

Save topics you know lead to arguments for another time and focus on conversations that will build relationships. Talk about the day's activities, each person's dreams, memories of fun family times, and things you'd like to do in the future. Really, the topics available for discussion are limited only by our imagination.

Plan a Few Dinner Surprises

Your family might enjoy dinner for breakfast or breakfast for dinner. Plan one "ethnic meal night" per week and travel the globe with culinary surprises. Eat your meal backwards, starting with dessert. Plan an "Iron Chef" night and let each family members cook one dish...the family can vote on best taste, presentation, and creativity after the meal. You get the idea. Do something different now and again. Make it a surprise...and have fun.

Turn off the Technology

Turn off TV's, video games, phones, and any other technology that has the potential to interfere with the moment's face-to-face interaction and family interaction. Learn to enjoy each other in the moment with no interruption.

Check Out This Great Resource

Here is a great resource to get started: The Family Dinner Project @ <http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/> . You can sign up for their "4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners" for free helps. They also provide ideas for recipes, conversation starters, meal activities, addressing various challenges, and meal preparation. This is a wonderful resource to bookmark and use on a regular basis.