



Eating Together as a Family

Scheduling time to eat together as a family has many benefits for children and families, including family bonding, improved language and developmental boosts, and health benefits.



Family Bonding

Eating meals together provides the family with a time that allows them to connect individually and as a whole. Research indicates when a family eats together, each member tends to feel a strong bond with each other. This helps children to feel loved and, safe and secure. Mealtime conversations should be positive and upbeat.

Improved Language and Developmental Boosts

Family communication during meals allows children to advance their language and literacy skills as well as their social skills, such as waiting, using manners, and taking turns. Children are also provided with time to work on developing their fine motor skills while learning how to use silverware and helping make meals.



Health Benefits

The family dynamic can influence a child's food-related behaviors which may impact maintaining a healthy weight status. Sharing a higher frequency of family meals has shown to increase family members' consumption of fruits and vegetables and lower the consumption of fried foods and soft drinks. Families who eat together are also more likely to be physically active.



Tips for Eating Together as a Family

Find a time within the day where the entire family can get together to share a meal, whether it be breakfast, lunch or dinner. And, try to include all family members in the planning and preparation of meals.



Tips for Scheduling

1. Choose any meal of the day to have as a family meal.
2. Cook several meals on a weekend day to save time prepping meals throughout the week.
3. Make your family meal a priority and communicate to family members the benefits of sharing a meal together and the importance.



Tips for Conversation

1. Ask about your child's day: What fun thing did you do today?
2. Tell stories about the parents: Do you know some of the jobs Mommy and Daddy had when they were young?
3. Use one-line conversation starters: If you could be an animal, what would you be and why?



Tips for Engagement

1. Have your child help to plan and/or prepare the family meals.
2. Provide all family members with a dinnertime chore (e.g., set the table, wipe down the counters, etc.).
3. Allow each family member to choose a night of the week where the family eats the meal of their choice.

Sources:

The Family Dinner Project: thefamilydinnerproject.org

Neumark-Sztainer, D., Hannan, P.J., Story, M., Croll, J., and Perry, C. Family meal patterns (Associations with sociodemographic characteristics and improved dietary intake among adolescents). *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2003; 103: 317–322

Story, M., Neumark-Sztainer, D., and French, S. Individual and environmental influences on adolescent eating behaviors. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2002; 102: S40–S51

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming. Visit the Thrive website <https://thrive.psu.edu>, and sign up today!