

EAT TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

It takes a little work to get everyone together, but it is worth it, and the whole family eats better!

Start eating meals together when your children are young. This way, it becomes a habit.

If you are not able to eat a meal together every day, set a goal. For instance, you could try having meals together as a family four times a week.

Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.

Family meals do not have to be held at the same time every day or even be the same meal every day. Time can be spent together at breakfast, lunch, dinner or even snack time! Most importantly, you are spending quality time together, and healthy food is part of it.

Family meals are a great time to introduce new fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

As a family, you can all try something different! By providing healthy options and trying new foods, you will serve as a role model for your family.

Focus on the meal and each other.

Turn off the TV, video games, and mobile phones.

Make family meals happy.

Try to make meals a stress-free time. Get children talking! Talk about fun and happy things. See the conversation starters below.

Offer a variety of healthy foods at family meal times.

Do not lecture or force your child to eat. Let your child choose how much of each food to eat. Avoid power struggles over what gets eaten and remember that mealtime is not a time for discipline.



Conversation starters:

“What was the best thing that happened today?”

“What made you feel really happy today?”

“What’s your favorite veggie. Why?”

“Tell me one thing you learned today.”

“What made you laugh today?”

“If you were invisible, where would you go and what would you do?”

Did you know...

Frequent family meals are linked with being successful in school, including getting better grades and scoring higher on achievement tests.

COOKING TO THRIVE

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If you do not want your child to eat it, do not bring it home.

You decide what foods are available in your home and what foods are offered, when, and where.

Stick to the *one-meal rule*.

Let your family know that you will prepare one meal instead of making separate meals. However, be sure to include at least one thing that each family member likes so everyone has something he or she can eat. Provide ways to personalize your meals. For instance, if you serve tacos have all the fillings in bowls so everyone can choose what to add.

Shop and cook together.

Involve your children in every step as much as possible. Take them to the grocery store and ask them to pick any fruit or vegetable they want. Have your children help you cook or set the table. Have your child pick out a new fruit or vegetable that the entire family can try together. Make it fun to be an adventurous eater and pick out a new food for the family to try.

Do not force your children to eat anything.

Do not insist they must try a food or “take a little bite.” Instead, as you eat it say things like “this broccoli is really good.”

Talk about how food is grown and cooked.

Talk to your kids about how someone had to plant a seed, harvest the food, etc. so they appreciate what goes into making a meal. Talk about food, nutrition, farming, and cooking. Try planting a small garden.

Be consistent but not rigid.

Make sure your child knows the rules.

Be a good role model.

Children take their cues from parents. If you do not like something, do not pretend to like it but express your pleasure that someone went to the trouble to prepare it.

Play and experiment with food.

Try different food games outside of dinnertime. Snacks are a good time to play games and try new foods. *Vegetable Tasting Extravaganza* - Try to many or new vegetables with different dips. *MyPlate Scavenger Hunt* - Show children MyPlate and have them show you which food goes into each group.

Do not refer to anyone as a *picky eater* or make a big deal about it.

If your child does not eat carrots, do not stop serving them, or, when you child is a guest at someone else's home, do not say: “My child does not like carrots.”

Use positive peer pressure.

Children are more likely to try and eat a food if they see other children eating it.