

Family Dinners Make a Difference!

Why should we eat dinner together more often?

- Dinner is a time to relax, recharge, laugh, tell stories and catch up on the day's ups and downs.
- Having dinner together can help keep your family close.

Do family dinners have any scientific benefits?

- Children and teens who have meals with their families show lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and depression, and higher grades and self-esteem.
- Dinner conversation is a vocabulary-booster for younger children, and regular family meals lower the rates of obesity and eating disorders.

How many nights a week should we try to eat dinner together?

There is no right number—try for family dinners as often as you can. If your family finds breakfast or weekend lunches easier meals for the family to share, great! What's important is making a regular, predictable time to connect as a family — it's about providing both warmth and structure.

We're just so busy. How can we find the time to cook and eat together?

One good idea is to cook a big batch of soup or a double batch of a casserole over the weekend, and then freeze some to make weekday dinners easier. Some meals can be thrown together quickly with help from store-bought ingredients, like pre-cut veggies, or a pre-made pizza dough.

Visit www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/ for ideas!

How can I help my family connect at mealtime?

Turn off the TV, phones, and other electronics during dinnertime. Try to sit down together at the table as a family and clean up together after the meal. Creating your own family rituals around dinner can help to reinforce the routine and the togetherness. And finally, have fun!

As long as we sit together and eat, does it really matter what we're eating?

The healthier the food, the better, but being together as a family is the most important part!

How much help should I expect from my family in preparing dinner? In cleaning up? Do I have to do this all myself?

Most kids like to help! Even young children can be asked to sprinkle a seasoning, stir a stew, or rinse vegetables. Elementary-aged kids can set and clear the table, pour the drinks and help with cooking. Teens can have a night to plan and cook dinner themselves or with you. And kids of all ages can help with clean up!

What types of meals should I make to get my kids more involved in dinner?

Prepare a meal that gives kids something to do. Any meal that calls for ingredients that kids can peel, mash, or sprinkle is a good one. Simple dishes that kids can customize also encourage participation. Parents or teens might make crepes, tacos, or even a pot of chicken rice soup, which younger kids in the family can add their favorite toppings to, like chopped carrots or peppers, roasted garlic or sliced cheese.

Tips for Conversation

Suggestions for younger children:

- Ask kids to talk about their favorite games, cartoons, or toys. For example, you might ask, “What can your favorite toy or cartoon character do that you’d like to do?”
- Ask your child to tell you about the most interesting part of their day.
- Talk about your ancestors and share family stories and history.

Suggestions for teens:

- Ask about a specific class or project in school.
- Discuss plans for the week-end.
- Ask for your teen’s opinion on a recent, interesting news item.
- Talk about what your grandparents/great-grandparents did for a living, or, if they emigrated to this country, where they came from and why they left their native land.

Brought to you by the Communities That Care Coalition.