

Eat better, eat as a family

With bad traffic and long work days, family dinners are becoming a thing of the past. It's a lot easier to grab fast food everyone eats in the car. Even if you cook a meal at home, it's hard to get everyone to the table at the same time.

But more and more research shows that family dinners are worth the extra effort.

Pass the peas, please

Eating dinner as a family makes everyone healthier. When families eat together, kids eat more fruits and veggies and less fried food and soda. They're also less likely to have eating disorders,¹ and more likely to keep a healthy weight.²

But health is only one part of what family meals can give your kids. Family dinners make kids less likely to:

- Get in trouble at school.²
- Start smoking cigarettes.³
- Drink alcohol.³
- Try illegal drugs or abuse prescription drugs.³
- Get depressed or think about suicide.⁴

Also, kids who eat with their families are more likely to:

- Put off having sex.⁴
- Get good grades.²
- Feel that their parents are proud of them.⁴

You'll also save money – eating out costs about twice as much as a home-cooked meal.⁴

Making dinner happen

Having family meals isn't always easy. But you can make it easier. Don't put pressure on yourself – or your kids – to make the perfect family time. Go slowly. If you usually eat one meal a week together, try for two.

Make a meal plan when the week starts, and make sure you have all the food you need. Do any prep work – chopping veggies, marinating meat, or even cooking and freezing casseroles – before, so your weeknights are more relaxed. Or use a crock pot when you can, so dinner is ready when you walk in the door.³

Try to make dinner a happy time when everyone feels supported. Don't bring up serious stuff. Turn off the TV and put away phones. Find out about what happened that day with your kids, and laugh together.³ Even if dinner is less than relaxing, you're showing good manners and healthy eating habits.¹ And, you're improving your kids' self-esteem.⁴



1 The Kellogg Company, *Celebrate the Family Table this March* (accessed December 6, 2011): kelloggsnutrition.com
2 Meals Matter, *Eat Better, Eat Together with Family Meals* (September 8, 2011): mealsmatter.org
3 WebMD, *Family Dinners Are Important* (July 17, 2007): webmd.com
4 CNN, *8 reasons to make time for family dinner* (October 25, 2011): cnn.com