

Reviving the Family Dinner



The family dinner is quickly becoming a distant memory to many American families and the dusty dining room table isn't the only thing suffering. In a recent article from the American Academy of Pediatrics, children and adolescents who share family meals three or more times per week are more likely to be in a normal weight range, have healthier diets and eating patterns as well as a decreased risk of eating disorders than children from families who do not regularly eat together. Despite these benefits, our family dinners are getting lost in the shuffle. There is good news however; with a few simple skills this American tradition can be revived.

Planning is Key

Avoid take out, delivery meals and fast food during the week by planning ahead.

- Take 20 minutes before heading to the grocery store to create a meal plan for the week.
- Sit down with your family members and discuss who will be home for dinners on what nights. Plan quicker meals or leftovers for busier days.
- Allow members to offer healthy suggestions for meals or side dishes. For larger families, have each child plan a meal for the week.

Make it Healthy and Balanced

Provide your family with a healthy, balanced meal with these simple steps:

- Offer at least three of the following food groups per meal: Meats or Beans, Whole Grains or Starches, Fruits, Vegetables and Dairy.
- Choose fresh, whole foods when possible rather than highly processed foods to limit the fat and sodium in your meals.
- Use healthy cooking techniques such as baking, broiling, grilling, roasting and steaming.

- Portion your plates:

- ¼ plate = one fist-sized portion of starch (pasta, rice, bread, potato, corn, beans)
- ¼ plate = one palm-sized portion of lean protein (fish, skinless poultry, lean meat, tofu, eggs, low-fat dairy)
- ½ plate = non-starchy vegetables (anything but corn, potato, winter squash) and fruit

Keep it Simple

You don't have to be a famous chef to put a meal on the table; take advantage of these time saving tips.

- Wash and cut fresh vegetables and fruits on the day of purchase to make meal preparation easier during the week.
- Take advantage of frozen vegetables that are steam cooked in the microwave and cook in just 90 seconds.
- Have kids participate in simple tasks such as washing veggies, tearing lettuce or setting the table. Teens can help with more advanced tasks such as prepping vegetables or even cooking with you.

Have Fun

Family dinners are a great time to catch up with your children and enjoy their company. Create a stress-free dining table with the following guidelines.

- Turn off the TV; this is a time to talk to one another, not zone out in front of the screen. Discuss your day; ask your children about their favorite class or teacher; discuss family plans or even stock some “question cards” at the table to get the conversation going.
- Don't stress about any younger, “picky eaters” – provide your little one with two foods you know he'll eat as well as part of the family dinner on his plate. Remember, it's your job to provide a balanced meal and your child's job to decide how much he will eat of the offered food.
- Mix it up! Try theme nights to break up the monotony. Have a “Make Your Own Pizza” night, “Stir Fry Saturday” or “Breakfast for Dinner” to keep the meals exciting and fun.

Sunday	Entrée - Lasagna made with whole wheat noodles, lean ground beef, spinach, part skim ricotta and mozzarella cheese Sides - Tossed salad with low-fat dressing
Monday	Entrée - Turkey burgers on whole grain buns Sides - Grilled summer squash and zucchini
Tuesday	Entrée - Greek salad roll-ups in whole wheat wraps Sides - Fruit salad
Wednesday	Breakfast for Dinner: Entrée - Broccoli, tomato and cheese omelets Sides - Oven roasted red potatoes and fruit salad (leftover from Tuesday)
Thursday	Entrée - Sweet & sour chicken stir fry with pineapple, carrots, red and green peppers Sides - Brown rice
Friday	Make Your Own Pizza Night: Whole wheat ready-to-bake pizza crust, low-fat mozzarella cheese and pizza sauce Toppings - Green and red peppers, turkey pepperoni, low sodium ham, pineapple, spinach, etc
Saturday	Entrée - Grilled lemon pepper chicken Sides - Baked sweet potato and steamed green beans



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