

# Meals Then and Now

## (Grades 4 to 7)

### Overview

In this lesson, Grade 4-7 students use inquiry processes (ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions) to explore how meals have changed over two or three generations by interviewing their parents and grandparents.

Estimated time: Class time for student presentations plus 20 minutes for wrap-up and discussion.

### Learning Outcomes

Students will

- demonstrate an understanding of what and how people from different cultures eat.
- identify the factors that have influenced what and how we eat today compared to what and how we ate in the past.
- evaluate the impact of today's way of life (use of technology, lifestyles, work schedules, etc.) on family meals.
- problem solve today's mealtime challenges.
- practice interviewing and presentation skills.
- According to the 2010 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada):

### Materials

- Student worksheet "[Meals then and now](#)"
- Cookbooks or recipe collection
- [Better Together parent handout](#)
- [Better Together bookmarks](#), available free from BC Dairy Association

### Procedures

#### **Learning Activity 1:** Interview Parents and Grandparents

- a. Before discussing family meals in the classroom, students will gather information from their parents and grandparents using the student worksheet, "Meals then and now". Neighbours or family friends can easily serve as surrogate grandparents.

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### Learning Activity 2: Prepare a Class Report

Students will prepare a brief presentation summarizing the key findings from their family member interviews. Students can report on the following:

- What are the main differences?
- Why are there differences?

### Learning Activity 3: Discuss Family Meals

a. Ask students the following questions:

- How often did your parents/grandparents eat together as a family?
- Did your grandparents eat something your family probably wouldn't eat now? Why not?
- Do you have a meal on your family's list that your grandparents would not have eaten? Why not?
- Are there food traditions that your parents or grandparents used to observe that they no longer practice?
- Are there food traditions related to your family's cultural background?
- How was the meal prepared then? How is the meal prepared now (e.g. who cooks it, do all family members help, how is it cooked, how long does it take, etc...)?
- What do you think is the main difference between the three meals you have listed? What do you think caused meals to change?

b. Ask students to reflect on what, how and when they can help at home with making meals:

- What could you do to help out at breakfast or dinner?
- Are there any dishes you know how to prepare? Is there something you would like to learn how to cook? What tasks would you like to help with?
- Would you like to help plan or shop for meals? What tasks would you like to help with?
- Which day of the week might be the best day to start? (e.g. weekends might be better than busy weekdays).

c. Students can write a letter to their parents to let them know about how they might like to help out at mealtime.

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### Extension

- For further exploration, students may wish to compare several cultural backgrounds using these questions. Instead of comparing three generations, students can interview newcomers and compare meals in the country of origin with meals eaten in Canada. What has changed? What stayed the same?

### More information for Teachers

#### Curriculum Links

This lesson supports Big Ideas and Learning Standards in the Physical and Health Education [BC curriculum](#) and can also link to other subject areas.

Better Together BC  
[bettertogetherbc.ca](http://bettertogetherbc.ca)

#### Background

- The average time spent on meals was 1 hour and 19 minutes per day.
- People spent less time socializing with friends and relatives, including face-to-face and telephone conversations and restaurant meals. In particular, the time spent on socializing outside the home dropped by 29 minutes, to 2 hours 9 minutes.
- Computer and video game use was on the rise.
- Canadians say mealtime is the favourite time of day for family members to interact and talk about their day. However, time spent with family has decreased by 18% between 1986 and 2005, and a big part of the decline is the time spent on family meals. (Source: Canadian Social Trends, 2007)
- As children get older, eating meals together as a family becomes more difficult.
- The frequency of eating meals together as a family varies depending on the cultural and ethnic background.
- Canadian data show the average time spent preparing a meal is 15–30 minutes now compared to 45 minutes a decade ago.

#### Want to do more nutrition education with your class?

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