

Making Meals Matter Backgrounder

Parents have a big influence on what their kids think and do—and eat!

Mealtime provides the ideal opportunity for parents to role model eating habits by making healthy choices.

Did you know?

Daughters of parents who eat fruit and vegetables are more likely to do so themselves¹.

Mothers who drink more milk and less pop influence their daughters to do the same².

Are family dinners disappearing?

Family meals are not extinct BUT

- 27% eat supper together at home two or fewer times/week³.
- 12% eat supper together at home less than once a week³.
- Family meals decrease as children get older⁴.

Do people value family meals?

Canadians say mealtime is the favourite time of day for family members to interact and talk about their day⁵.

Benefits of eating together for youth and young adults:

Better nutrition:

9 - 14 year olds who eat dinner with family four or more times a week consume⁶:

- More fruits and vegetables
- More fibre, calcium, folate, iron, vitamins B6, B12, C and E
- Less pop
- Less fried foods
- Less saturated fat and less trans fat

Middle & high school students who eat family meals⁷:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, grains, and calcium-rich foods
- Drink fewer soft drinks

Better Connection:

As the number of family meals increase, so do measure of family support, communication and expectations⁸.

Better health:

- Children and adolescents who eat more family meals are at a lower risk for overweight and obesity⁹.
- Increased frequency of eating together as a family seems to offer protection from eating disorders in adolescents¹⁰.

Reduced high-risk behaviours:

Adolescents who more frequently eat together with their parents are at lower risk for substance abuse and have better social adjustment (e.g. fewer fights, decreased early sexual activity) compared to adolescents who eat together with their parents less often¹¹.

Better school performance:

High school students who eat dinner with their families 4 times or more per week¹²:

- score higher on achievement tests
- have better grades

Results were similar among upper elementary students.

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What is considered a family meal?

Definition 1: When at least one adult and one child eat together.

Definition 2: When two or more people eat together!

What are some of the obstacles to sharing family meals?

- Too busy
- Parents' work schedule
- Kids' sport and activity schedules
- No time to shop or cook
- Don't know how to cook
- Family members don't like the same foods

What about TV and family meals?

Watching television during meals may negate the nutritional benefits of family meals. TV viewing during meals was associated with¹³:

- Fewer fruits and vegetables
- More pizzas
- More snack foods
- More pop
- Twice as much caffeine

Tips for increasing family meals

- Try breakfast instead of dinner.
- Try sandwiches instead of something hot.
- Involve all family members in food preparation.
- Turn off the ringer and turn on the answering machine.
- Turn off the TV It is NOT a family member!

References:

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