

## **Benefits of Families Eating Together**

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Meal preparation and nutritional content are often compromised because of the fast pace that we maintain. This month, I want to give you 7 reasons why it's important for families to sit down together and connect as often as possible. And now, you have some fast and healthy meal ideas from the September newsletter to make it happen! Consider the following:

- 1. Family Connections:** Mealtime is an opportunity to bond as a family, pray, talk, catch up on family news and learn from one another. Genuine family belonging is hard to achieve if family members are routinely eating in separate locations. Social skills are more likely to be taught
- 2. Financial Considerations:** Invariably, it will cost you more money to dine out or take out than it will to cook at home. Currently, the restaurant industry's share of the total food dollar is 46%. It's not unusual for individuals and families to eat out several times each week. Meals eaten away from home cost 2-4 times as much compared to similar meals made at home.
- 3. Improved Health Status:** Baskets of bread, chips and salsa, high calorie desserts and other food temptations...sound familiar? When you eat at home you control the portions, ingredients and food choices. Remember, restaurants are in the business of pleasure and profit. The "economic" choices of dining out include ordering "combo" meals that offer an entrée, a side dish or two and beverage for a predetermined price. We tend to eat the quantity served. This is no doubt contributing to the obesity epidemic in our country.
- 4. Nutritious Food Choice and Nutrient Intake:** Research shows that meals eaten at home are usually higher in fruits, vegetables and dairy products. Also, at home we tend to minimize fried foods, sodas and high sodium side dishes. Typically the meals are higher in fiber, calcium, folate, vitamins B6, B12, C and E. They also tend to be lower in saturated fat, sugar, sodium, trans fats, cholesterol and total calories compared to restaurant meals.
- 5. Family Dinners Enhance Academic Motivation:** Believe it or not, children that eat frequent dinners at home with their families have higher academic performance than children that don't. Younger children benefit from the exposure to adult conversation.
- 6. Enhanced Mental Health and Less Teen Substance Abuse:** Eating together fosters emotional well-being. Teens tend to report less depression, fewer mental health problems and less boredom. Lower rates of smoking, drinking and illegal drug use among teens are seen with more frequent family dining.
- 7. Self-sufficiency and Preservation of Food Heritage:** The problem with preparing fewer meals at home is our cooking ability decreases as we eat out more. Children learn by example and sharing in the cooking process. Those skills are not being passed on as we choose to eat out more. And what about food heritage? Each generation is cooking less than the previous. Family recipes are at risk for being lost. Food traditions are part of our cultural identity and worth preserving.

Make family meals at home a priority as often as you can. Increasing your meals at home even by one time each week is a step in the right direction. Use some of the tips from September's

newsletter article to prepare more meals at home. Be sure to ask your children to help so that they learn about food preparation and appreciate the meals and traditions of your family.