Get Up & Move!

Parent Newsletter Series 2: October

Family Meals

October is National Eat Better; Eat Together month. This month celebrates families eating meals together. Children say they enjoy eating meals with their families because it gives them the opportunity to share their day, find out what other family members have been doing, and just to laugh.

Tips for creating quality family meals:

- Aim for four or more family meals a week
- Make family meals a priority
- Keep a sense of humor during the meal
- Make the meal quick and easy to prepare so you can have more time for conversation
- Work toward happy, relaxing conversations
- Shop for and cook food together
- Don’t take telephone calls during family meals
- Turn off the TV during family meals
- Respect each person’s right to choose what foods and how much he/she eats

When Adults and Children Eat Together…

- Children do better in school
- Children have fewer behavior problems
- Teenagers feel less apt to use drugs and alcohol
- Communication improves between children and adults
- Children understand their family’s values and traditions
- Traditions are often created around food and meals
- Meals are more nutritious and healthful
- Food dollars go further
- Time is better utilized because the family cooks only one meal
- The family is often involved in meal preparation

Don’t Battle Over Food

Sometimes it can be difficult to develop pleasant family mealtimes. Parents want their children to eat and be healthy, which can sometimes lead to “power struggles” with children. This can also lead to parents bribing their children to eat certain foods. These struggles can be reduced by understanding “who does what.” This strategy is simple and it works, but it takes some practice.
Parents Decide…

1. **What food is served.** Mealtime is an opportunity for parents to provide nutritious food choices.

2. **When the food is served.** Set mealtimes provide an opportunity for parent/child interaction throughout the day.

Children decide:

1. **How much food to eat.** Serve small portions and allow your children to ask for seconds. Let your children’s body tell them if they’ve eaten enough.

2. **Whether or not to eat.** Don’t worry if a child doesn’t eat well at a meal. If the child is not snacking, s/he’ll eat if hungry. Have the child sit at the table anyway to show that mealtimes are important to the family.

Establish a predictable schedule of meals and snacks for children. Parents should also try to avoid using dessert as a bribe to get children to eat their food.

Recruiting younger children to help with meal preparation can be a little extra work, but it is very beneficial. Younger children can help set the table, toss salad, pour beverages, and fold napkins. Older children can help get ingredients, wash produce, mix, stir, and serve. If you have teenagers, consider allowing them to cook a meal, with you as their helper.

Family meals are a good time to teach good behavior that children can also use when eating away from home. Try to establish rules about staying seated, passing food instead of reaching for it, putting napkins on laps, and not talking with a mouthful of food. You can remind children about manners during meals, but try to keep tension and discipline at a minimum. The focus should be on making your children feel nurtured, connected, and part of the family.

Source: [www.nutrition.wsu.edu](http://www.nutrition.wsu.edu); [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)