

Enjoying The Family Meal

Family meals are important. You create close bonds and lifelong memories around the family table. Family meals can teach your child about healthful eating. You just need to be a good role model. When you try new foods your child may be more adventurous with food, too.

Try these easy ways to make family meals a pleasant part of your family routine.



- **Set a regular family mealtime.** Regular mealtimes give your child a better chance to eat a variety of foods to get the right amount to grow, stay healthy, and keep a healthy weight.
- **Make it simple, make it quick!** Spend less time in the kitchen and more time at the family table. Simple meals, even cold sandwiches, taste as good as meals that take more work. You can make any meal special if you all feel relaxed and if mealtime is filled with caring and laughter. Simplify – to take care of you, too!
- **Show that family meals are important.** During mealtime, turn off the TV. Find another way to see favorite shows. Let the answering machine take your phone calls, too. Have your family make calls before or after the meal hour. Show that same respect for other families when you make phone calls.
- **Eat around a table.** It's easier to talk and listen to your family when you face each other. Eating side-by-side at the kitchen counter takes away eye contact.
- **Enjoy meal talk.** Make easy conversations – no nagging or complaining. Talk so everyone can be a “star” at mealtime. Don’t take over. Your child will listen and learn by feeling included.
- **Be realistic about mealtime.** Try to sit down together. Keep meals from lasting too long. If kids get fussy, your family meal won’t be fun. Wait until everyone is done to be excused.

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“I Can Help!”

Helping with family meals makes your child feel important in your family. You get time together, too. Your child learns even when tasks are not perfectly done. So even if you work faster alone, **ask your child to help you.**

- **Pick** flowers for the table.
- **Create** paper placemats.
- **Put** pets in another room, if they demand family attention at mealtime.
- **Clear and wash** the table. Wash his or her hands.
- **Help** with table setting.
- **Help** with simple kitchen tasks, perhaps tearing salad greens or putting bread in a basket.
- **Pour** milk, perhaps with your help.
- **Turn off** the TV. Turn on fun music.
- **Clear and clean** the table.
- **Ask** “What would you like to do to help me?” Jot their ideas down.



Try this:

Does it seem impossible to fit family meals into your hectic schedule? Go step by step. Try to enjoy at least one family meal together each week. See what works, and plan from there.