

## Family Meals...Worth Making a Priority!

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### When was the last time you sat down for a meal with your family?

For many, family mealtime has been lost in our overscheduled lives. School, work schedules and extracurricular activities can make it difficult to find time to eat together and some go days or weeks without sitting down to share a meal as a family. However, family meals are important. Researchers have found that families who share meals together on a regular basis, whether it's breakfast, lunch or dinner reap many benefits.



In a recent article, Maureen Bligh, Andrea Garen and Ashley Rosales; Registered Dietitians with the Dairy Council of California; shared the following information re-emphasizing studies which have shown that **children who eat with their families are better nourished, have lower rates of obesity and better vocabularies. These factors can have a positive impact on classroom behavior and academic performance.** And when it comes to improving the health of our children, family meals are a great way to instill healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

### Research into family meals and their benefits is becoming more in depth, with some interesting findings:

- **Dining as a family can create an environment for parents to lead by example** for their children. Children who eat with their families consume more fruits, vegetables, milk and dairy foods compared to those who eat fewer family meals<sup>5</sup>.
- **Adults also report that eating as a family is a positive portion of their day.** Mealtime creates a feeling of togetherness and family cohesion. The concept of family meals does not exclude single-parent homes or couples without children. The routine associated with meals can provide a protective value for some of the risks associated with single-parent homes. For couples, the routine of sitting down together carves out time for each other and creates work schedule boundaries creating a balance between work and personal life.
- **There is an association between family meal frequency and lower rates of obesity.**

**But the benefits of family meals go beyond nutrition and family unity. Family meals are also an opportunity to promote child development.** Regular family meals teach children many things that will enrich their lives beyond the immediate health benefits of eating nutritious food.

1. **Memories** Taking the time to sit together at mealtime helps create positive memories for yourself and your family.
2. **Enjoyment** The first and most important place where children learn positive attitudes about food is in the home. Eating meals together starts a lasting and positive relationship with food.
3. **Self Esteem** Mealtime conversation brings the family together and promotes positive self-esteem in children.
4. **Life skills** Children learn best by doing, not watching, so get them involved! You can teach children how to cook balanced meals for themselves by including them in meal planning and preparation.
5. **Traditions** Mealtime is an ideal time to strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions. Whether you are celebrating a holiday or just eating an everyday meal, things you do in your home will be passed down to your children and grandchildren.
6. **Curiosity** Kids are more likely to try new foods when they are involved in meal preparation. They have a natural curiosity about food so be sure to offer new foods at mealtime (but never force them to try them.)
7. **Relaxation** Family meals are the perfect time to connect with each other and share your stories of the day. Shared time and positive experiences with your children is great way connect and relax together after a hectic day of work, school and errands.
8. **Responsibility** Research has shown that cooking with kids and assigning tasks surrounding mealtime, promotes independence and a sense of responsibility in the kitchen – and in life.
9. **Communication** Having conversations at mealtime increases your children’s vocabulary. Encourage them to speak by asking about the best part of their day and probe more about what made the best part so great.
10. **Love** Children watch and imitate adults, and look to them to learn proper behavior for everything from saying please and thank you to learning about fitness and nutrition. Mealtime is the ideal time to remind your children every day that they are important and loved.

### **Isn't it time to make family meals a habit in your home?**

Find the original article at: <https://www.healthyeating.org/Healthy-Eating/Meals-Recipes/Family-Meal-Planning/Article-Viewer/Article/314/Why-Family-Meals-Matter>.

Find more information about these topics and others, by contacting the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district](http://www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district).

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