



# Nutrition *fact sheet*

## Meal Times Matter!

Interested in improved family communication, stronger family ties, and providing a greater sense of belonging to your family? Eat meals together!

Meal times matter - especially for families! Children who eat more meals with their families do better in school, and reduce their risk-taking behaviors, such as using drugs and alcohol, and getting into fights.\*

Eating together has some major health benefits, too. Families eating at home eat less fat and fewer calories than when they eat out. This is good, but there's even more good news! Several studies have shown that teens and children eat in a more healthy manner when they eat with their families. A University of Minnesota study, looking specifically at middle and high school students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds found family meals were associated with lower intakes of soft drinks, fried foods and snack foods. Children of these ages also consumed more vitamins and minerals that most of us need to increase:

**Fruits • Vegetables • Calcium-rich foods • Iron • Fiber • Vitamins A, C, E, and B6 • Folate**

Take advantage of the opportunity during family meals to teach about healthy eating. Children imitate the adults in their lives. Eat a variety of healthy foods and flavors to encourage your children to do the same. Stop eating when you are no longer hungry, even if there is some food left on your plate. Your children will notice this and suddenly it will make sense to them to trust their own internal hunger signals. Your children will learn to stop eating when they feel full, not just when their plate is clean. This is a key anti-obesity strategy! Model polite eating behaviors, and your child's table manners will make you proud. Our actions speak as loudly as, or maybe even louder than, our words. Set your child up for success by modeling healthy choices yourself.

### Ready to build a happier, healthier family?

- Make meals together a priority. Schedule meals together and make it happen.
- Enjoy more table time together by keeping meals healthful but easy.
- Include kids in a variety of ways - menu ideas, meal preparation or conversation ideas.
- Turn off the TV and focus on each other. Sit around a table and keep the talk positive. Encourage everyone to talk and to listen.

**Get the Table Talk Rolling** (Hint: ask these types of open-ended questions. They require more than a yes/no response)

- Tell me about your favorite activity today.
- What made you laugh today?
- What made you the happiest today?
- What did you do that was good for your body/mind today?
- What surprised you today?
- What person did you enjoy talking to the most today? Why?
- Tell me about the best thing that happened to you today.



\*Source: [http://www.familymeals.org/PDFs/Family\\_Meals\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.familymeals.org/PDFs/Family_Meals_Fact_Sheet.pdf)