

Family Mealtime

Family meals provide valuable time to build relationships, talk about what is important, and enjoy healthy foods. Time together gives many lasting benefits.

Aim for family meals that:

- Are at consistent and predictable times
- Involve every family member
- Is free of distractions - no TV, calls, cell phones, ipods, etc.
- Include lots of positive conversation and listening
- Offers a variety of healthy food options in the right portions
- Are fun and memorable
- Value the time together as a family

How can families make it happen? Try these helpful hints:

- Talk with family members.
 - What do we like to eat? Serve favorite foods and some new ones, too.
 - What time is best? Make it as convenient as possible.
 - What things are ok to discuss? What are not?
 - What behavior is acceptable and what is not?
- Plan family meals ahead.
 - Start with one meal each week and add more when you can.
 - Keep a list handy of quick family favorite meals.
- Set clear and simple rules.
 - Talk about what is expected from each family member.
 - Table manners are an important learning experience.
- Involve the whole family.
 - Decide how tasks will be shared. Will family members take turns?
- Add variety and be spontaneous.
 - Try different places (parks, restaurants, the backyard, etc.)
 - Be adventurous with new foods.
 - Seasonal themes and table settings make it fun.
- Make it a learning experience
 - Table manners are an important learning experience
 - Teach children how to choose healthy foods and menus.
 - Give specific tasks to family member, according to their ability.
 - Serve foods in new and attractive ways to add appeal and interest.

Make It Fun!

- “Kid’s Rule” - Let children do it all, from planning to clean-up. They love to help!
- Restaurant Night
 - Set up the dining room or kitchen like a restaurant. Ask everyone to dress nicely. Dim the lights. Make it as much like a restaurant as possible.
 - OR... create healthier versions of your family’s favorite restaurant foods.
- Geography Night
 - Choose a country and make dinner with foods from that country. Your family will try new foods and have new favorites.
- Invite a friend - Who doesn’t love having someone over for dinner?!
- Spotlight Night
 - Take turns with family members being a “Very Important Person” (VIP). This person gets a special plate/placemat, chooses the menu and VIP treatment for the night.
- Alphabet dinners
 - Choose a letter of the alphabet and foods that begin with that letter. “A” night may include avocados, asparagus, and apricots. Your family will like to trying new foods.
- Family breakfast - Family meals can be anytime.
- Be creative - Get your family to brainstorm!

Remember:
The PARENT’S role is to provide the *time, place, and healthy foods in proper portions.*
The CHILD’S role is to decide *whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat.*

Make It Healthy

- Offer a variety of foods – whole grains, fruits, veggies, dairy, lean protein.
- Limit foods with fat, cholesterol, sugar, and sodium.
- Serve a healthy appetizer first.
- Start a tradition of an after dinner family activity (walk, game, etc.).
- Use small plates to control portions.
- Serve only healthy beverages with meals (low-fat milk, water, 100% fruit juice.)
- Desserts- serve rarely or offer “Go” foods like fruit.

Save Money!

- Plan menus ahead of time.
- Fix what only what you will use and avoid waste.
- Keep a running list of things used most often.
- Use what you have. Be creative, this may result in a new family favorite!
- Buy in bulk.
- Shop the sales. Buy fruits and vegetables when in season.
- Make “doubles” - When making casseroles, etc. make enough for two meals.

For more information contact your local WVU Extension Service office or visit www.ext.wvu.edu.

We also recommend the *Eat Better Eat Together* materials at: <http://nutrition.wsu.edu/ebet/toolkit.html>