

# Enjoy More Mealtimes Together



Sometimes a simple act can have a profound impact. Eating more meals together can improve physical, mental, and emotional health for your whole family. Studies show that family meals can have a positive effect on nutrition, weight, and children's behavior.

## ★ Plan one more family mealtime in every week.

Take a quick inventory of how many times you usually eat together now. Then plan to add just one more family mealtime per week. If dinnertime is too hectic, add a leisurely weekend breakfast or lunch. After a month or two of this new pattern, you can then add another family meal each week – until, before you know it, you are enjoying eating together at least five times every week.

## ★ Plan tasty menus for family meals together.

If you think that putting a meal together has to be complicated or time-consuming, think again! The best meals are simple, delicious, and planned together. Let everyone choose a favorite menu for one day. Even small children can pick a main dish (like tacos or pasta), a veggie (green salad or cooked carrots) and fruit for dessert (sliced apples or canned peaches in juice).

## ★ Plan to set a special table for family meals.

Food is just one important part of mealtime. There are many other ways to set the mood for an enjoyable and relaxed time around the table together. A little extra attention to the actual table setting (with very little expense) can add a lot to mealtime atmosphere. Some inexpensive possibilities include: a candle, some colored napkins, or wipe-clean, plastic tablemats for children.

## ★ Plan to enjoy conversation at the table.

Many mealtime benefits come from the conversations that families have while eating together. Children learn new words from the adults – and adults are able to share family values with the next generation. Choose topics that are positive and allow everyone to participate. Even toddlers like to offer their opinions on topics like “what is your favorite color” or “what made you laugh today.”

## ★ Plan to turn off the TV and telephones.

Loud television noise and multiple phone calls can upset anyone's mealtime routine – making it difficult to eat or carry on a conversation. The solution is simple: Declare mealtime a TV and phone-free zone (except for emergencies, of course). Turn off the distractions for just 30 minutes. Imagine you are dining at a nice restaurant and play some soothing background music at low volume.