

5 Easy Ways to Enjoy More Mealtimes Together

1. 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.

2. 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).

3. 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.

4. 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.*”

5. 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.



5 Easy Ways to Spend More Time Playing Together

1. Plan time to **PLAY OUTSIDE** together.

A family that plays together stays healthier together. Give each person a chance to choose an outdoor activity for everybody to play together. Depending on the weather, you could throw a Frisbee, fly a kite, ride bicycles, or go up and down the slide at the park. You might also be able to play tag, pick up a game of basketball, or draw an old-fashioned game of hopscotch on the sidewalk.

2. Plan time to **TAKE A WALK** together.

Walking can easily become a game rather than an exercise. You can always take a dog. They love to play with balls and sticks. Children of all ages can really get into a silly game of *Simon Says*. Walk with your hands on your head or behind your back; Swing your arms like a chimpanzee or an elephant's trunk; Prance along on your tippy toes, twirl in circles, or just skip along together.

3. Plan time to **PLAY INSIDE** together.

Being active indoors can be lots of fun too. Clear some space for playing with soft *Nerf*® or *Koosh*® balls. Get all tied up in a game of *Twister*® - or get hooked on one of the active video games, like *Dance Dance Revolution*®. Kids love to move their bodies in almost any imaginable way. You can have lots of fun just crawling around like wild animals or with a game of indoor hide-and-seek.

4. Plan time to **DANCE** together.

Dancing is the perfect family activity – a delightful combination of movement for your body, music for your ears, and joy for your heart. Indoors or outdoors, there's no need to follow any specific rules or steps. All you need is music and a little bit of space. Children love to learn new moves from videos – or just to make up their own creative routines as the music moves them.

5. Plan time to **TAKE A CLASS** together.

Want to learn some new skills and play together at the same time? Check out the classes at your local YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, dance studio, or fitness center. Many now offer instruction – and fun – for the whole family together. If you're not able to make a long-term commitment, ask about family fun nights in the gym – or splash-and-play events in the pool.

