

# Family Mealtime

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## Keep it FUN! Keep it SIMPLE! Just KEEP it!

Family mealtime is much more than something good to eat! It nourishes the body, mind, and soul. Sharing foods in a pleasant, social environment is healthy for families in many ways. The whole family benefits from family mealtime by:

- ☺ eating a variety of healthy foods,
- ☺ improving communication with everyday conversation,
- ☺ fostering family traditions, and
- ☺ teaching life skills to children.

Family mealtime benefits children's intellectual, physical, and emotional development. Children can learn valuable life lessons by:

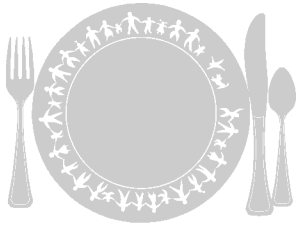
- ☺ watching adults using such skills as table manners, conversation, sharing, etc.;
- ☺ making healthful food choices;
- ☺ regulating portion sizes according to their own feelings of hunger and fullness;
- ☺ practicing fine motor and coordination skills such as pouring, scooping, and serving;
- ☺ sharing, taking turns and socializing, which builds self-confidence and self-esteem; and
- ☺ taking responsibility in setting the table, preparing food, and cleaning up.

TIME is a big challenge for many families. Even the busiest families can find time to eat together. But it's not easy. As a family, talk about how important mealtime is. Ask family members for their ideas about how to make mealtime peaceful and enjoyable for everyone.

### **Here are a few creative examples of ways family members can make time for one another:**

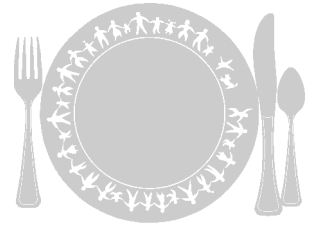
1. Turn off the television during mealtime.
2. Plan ahead every week to anticipate work, school, and other activities that may affect mealtime.
3. Be flexible about the time of family meals. Maybe breakfast is the one meal when everyone can be together.
4. Get creative about where you eat together. Ball practice? Pack a "picnic" dinner or "tailgate."
5. Share the responsibilities of shopping, preparing, serving, and cleaning up. If possible, get into a routine of shared tasks.
6. Plan simple and quick meals. Together, make a list of easy family favorites to keep on hand for extrahectic days.
7. Have a potluck meal with neighbors or friends to share the cooking and the fun.

Whether family meals happen every day or occasionally, your family will feel the rewards of spending more time together. Savor the food *and* savor the time.



## Turn Ho-Hum to Family Fun!

How can mealtime go from ho-hum to family fun? INVOLVE everyone! For starters, here is a month of ideas. How many more ideas can you and your family add?



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Play mealtime trivia.	Draw mealtime duties from a hat.	Light candles and turn on special music.	Make a creative table centerpiece with fresh fruit or vegetables.	Spread a blanket in the family room for an inside picnic.	Invite a guest to share in your meal.	Put "Table Talk" conversation topics in a bowl or cup and take turns passing it.
Read a favorite poem or story.	Add a "secret ingredient" to a favorite recipe and try to guess what it is.	Challenge today's cook to make up an original recipe.	Fix a salad bar with lots of ingredients so everyone can "have it their way."	Read the grocery store ads together and plan the next week's meals.	Challenge the family to think of a food starting with each letter of the alphabet.	Make "Family Soup" with an ingredient of choice by each family member.
Make special place settings with place mats, name place cards, or unusual dishes.	Everyone wear a favorite hat to dinner.	Make a meal with a variety of healthful finger foods and appetizers.	Create a "top 10" list of favorite family meals.	Fix a baked potato bar with a variety of toppings to suit the whole family.	Talk about how your parents' or grandparents' meals may be different from your meals.	Challenge the family to clean up the kitchen in record time. Guess how long it will take, set the timer, and give a prize to the closest guess.
Take pictures of family members doing cooking and mealtime tasks. Display on the refrigerator.	What foods are grown in West Virginia? Brainstorm as many as your family can think of.	Hide a surprise note under each person's plate with a cleanup chore.	At the grocery store, divide up the list and let each family member do the shopping. Meet at the checkout.	Interview another person about a favorite mealtime memory and share them during family mealtime.	How many sayings can your family think of that have food in them? ( <i>Hint: "It's as easy as pie."</i> )	Can your family make up wacky names for the foods on their plates?



## Mealtime Trivia

Have fun at your next family meal with these “Table Talk” topics! Cut ✂ along the dotted lines and place topics in a bowl. Pass the bowl and take turns reading and talking about each topic.



What is the strangest food you have ever eaten?



Can you think of any songs about food? Sing one!



What is your favorite food? Why do you like it?



What information is found on a food package? Why is the information important for consumers?



Name one food that you have never eaten but would like to try.



Can “an apple a day keep the doctor away?”



Can you name a vegetable that is a root? A flower? A stem? A leaf?



What are favorite foods of famous people or cartoon characters?



Guess what percentage of the average family’s food dollar is spent on food away from home.  
(Answer: approximately 45 percent.)



It’s estimated that 15 percent of the total West Virginia population are hungry.  
How can our family help others who are hungry and do not have enough food?



### Resources:

*Table Talk*, Mimi Wilson and Mary Beth Lagerborg,  
Focus on the Family Publishing, Colorado Springs,  
Co. 1994

1998: 12M

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