

Family Meals: Eating Better, Together

October is [National Eat Better, Eat Together Month](#). It's a time to reflect on the importance of **eating more healthfully** and **eating together**.



If you have children or a partner at home, all of the never-ending togetherness during the pandemic may have you *wanting* to eat meals alone. But, don't give up on family meals yet! There are SO many benefits of eating meals together as a family, and those benefits don't just apply to your kiddos.

And, no, it doesn't have to be every meal and it doesn't even have to be dinner. Do what works for your household this week. If mornings are lower key these days, eat breakfast together. If you're working late hours but breaking mid-day at the same time as your partner, eat lunch together.

The bottom line is that eating together leads to so many benefits. Here are just a few:

Why It's Important To Eat Meals Together

1. **Better eating** – People who eat together tend to make more healthful choices. It's true. According to a [recent study](#), people choose more whole foods—like vegetables and fruits—and fewer processed foods when they share a meal.
2. **Quality bonding time** – Sitting down to a meal together—especially when technology is not invited to dinner—provides a great opportunity to spend real quality time together. It's a chance to really talk to each other. Find out what everyone is doing, learning, listening to, etc. One of our go-to dinner conversation starters is... One thing that you learned today and one thing that made you laugh. And, you can find a ton of conversation starter cards online.
3. **Better grades and vocabulary** – Numerous [studies](#) show the tremendous academic benefits of family meals. Children who eat with their families regularly earn better grades, score better on tests and have a bigger vocabulary. This is important for any age, any grade.
4. **Boosts self-esteem** – This is a huge one. Research shows that shared family meals may help increase the likelihood of positive moods and more self-confidence in young adolescents, help kids rebound from [cyberbullying](#) and may help [lower](#) the incidence of depression, disordered eating and alcohol/substance abuse in adolescents.
5. **Nourishing the body** – This one goes for kids and adults

alike. I work with a lot of parents who expend so much energy to feed their kids healthfully, but not so much when it comes to feeding themselves. Start off the family meal by offering—everyone at the table—nourishing, nutritious foods. Think of eating together as a long-term insurance plan for helping you and your kids eat healthfully and manage weight. A *Journal of Pediatrics* [study](#) found a direct correlation between eating family meals together and a reduced likelihood of obesity or weight struggles for children later in life.

Seriously, the act of sharing family meals impacts the whole family now and down the road. If you're sold on family meals but struggle to get a healthy meal on the table or even just to get everyone to the table, here are some tips that may help.



Tips to Make It Happen

- **Make it regular.** Aim to eat one meal together as a family every day. Again, make it whatever meal works for your family. If a meal is too much, aim for even just sitting together for a nutritious mid-afternoon snack before everyone goes off in different directions. If every day doesn't work, aim for at least a few meals each week. The idea is to eat together more often, so start there.
- **Get everyone in the kitchen to help!** Family meals shouldn't be a burden on one person. Assign age-appropriate roles to everyone. Younger children can help wash produce and set the table. Older kids can help cook and clean up. Another adult can grocery shop. And,

everyone can help meal plan!

- **Keep it simple.** A cereal breakfast with fruit counts! Eggs, leftover veggies and whole grain toast counts! A spread of hummus, raw veggies, olives, fruit, cheese and toasted whole wheat pita makes a crazy-simple lunch, dinner or snack. It's not about what you prepare or cook, it's about spending time together and nourishing bellies.
- **Create a relaxing ambiance.** Set the table, turn on soft background music and turn off technology! If you have a flower garden, put a vase of fresh flowers on the table. If it's nice outside, dine al fresco.
- **Aim for pleasant, not perfect.** 'Nuff said.

PLEASE SHARE: What are some of your favorite ways to #EatBetterEatTogether? Please share. We'd love to hear from you!

#EatBetterEatTogetherMonth