



# Good for You!

## Family Meals Serve Us Well

Years ago, family meals were the *only* meals—everyone ate together, talked together and enjoyed not only food but also the support and socialization of sitting down together and sharing a meal. Today, family meals are more important than ever—and worth the effort!



### Why Eat Together?

Many factors have caused the shared meal to disappear from the family dinner table. But it's NOT because children—even teens—are not interested, or parents either! Families say schedule conflicts are the problem—work, school and activities get in the way, and it seems there is just no time.

Making time for family meals benefits children and adults alike. Family meals tell much about the quality of family relationships. Children and teens who share meals with

their parents have improved food habits. They tend to eat more fruits, vegetables and dairy foods, and less fried food and soft drinks at meals eaten with their families.

The benefits don't stop with young children. How often a family eats dinner together is a strong indicator of whether a teen is prone to smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs, or is likely to perform well in school. Family meals may also help protect adolescents from eating disorders.

### Where Can You Begin?

Talk over the idea of family meals with other adults in your home. Then bring the children on board with the idea. The keys are *realistic expectations* and *consistency*. Here are some tips:

#### *Turn off the TV.*

Remember, it's not a member of the family! Let phone calls and text messages wait until later—make sharing the meal the priority.

#### *Fix meals together.*

Children learn cooking skills and appreciation of foods and family.

#### *Avoid too many rules for mealtime.*

Instead, try to model the actions and behaviors you would like children to show.

#### *Let everyone speak.*

Take turns talking and listening.

#### *Keep the meal pleasant.*

Positive meals have lasting effects that are passed to your children and are valued for life.



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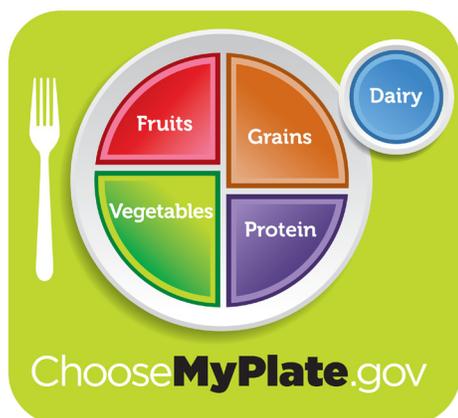
## Family Meals the MyPlate Way

What you eat and drink and your level of physical activity are important for your own health, and also for your children's health.

You can do a lot to help your children develop healthy habits for life by providing and eating nutritious meals and snacks. For example, don't just tell your children to eat their vegetables—show them that you eat and enjoy vegetables every day.

### *Build a Healthy Plate.*

Before you and your family eat, think about what goes on your plates or in your cups or bowls. Foods like vegetables,



fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods contain the nutrients you need without too many calories.

- ▶ Make half your plate fruits and vegetables
- ▶ Switch to skim or 1% milk
- ▶ Make at least half your grains whole grains
- ▶ Vary your protein food choices
- ▶ Choose foods and drinks with little or no added sugars
- ▶ Enjoy your food, but eat less



## What Makes a Family?

A recent poll revealed that 60% of Americans believe “If you consider yourself a family, you ARE a family!” So the idea of family meals holds something for everyone—there are benefits to eating with others no matter our age, life stage, schedule or situation.

## Shared Meals....Not Just for Kids!

Family meals serve the well-being of more than children and their parents. Shared meals provide important nutrients, to be sure, but just as with kids, benefits for older adults go well beyond nutrition. When eating becomes a social event, many positive things happen. Appetite is stimulated, and meals are more likely to be balanced and varied. When people do not eat with others, their nutritional health can suffer, which can lead to additional health concerns. Eating with family and friends, even occasionally, can help offset an older adult's feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness.

The Healthy Aging Partnership offers these suggestions to senior solo eaters—invite a friend over for dinner or eat out at a family-style restaurant where groups of people sit together. Or, consider a local senior center for a low-cost and balanced meal with other older adults. Eating together helps us eat better...at any age.



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