

5 Tips for Promoting Family Meals

Focus on Benefits

The benefit of eating together families value most is the opportunity to connect with one another. Building closer families, strengthening communication, and promoting a sense of identity and belonging are strong motivators to achieving family meals. Family meals are also associated with academic success, improved social skills, reduced risk-taking behaviors, and healthier diets.

Overcome Barriers

In spite of their many benefits, families struggle with achieving family meals as often as they would like. The biggest barrier is a lack of time, which is often related to conflicting schedules and the fatigue caused by work and family commitments. Other barriers include a lack of meal planning and cooking skills, dealing with picky eaters, and the fear of conflict around the table.

Set Realistic Expectations

Unrealistic aspirations of gourmet menus served on china with perfectly behaved children work against being successful. A family meal is simply when the people who live together come together to eat and talk. They don't have to be fancy, and they can be eaten at home or away. Perfect attendance is not required. Two family members eating at the same time and place is a family meal.

Focus on Consistency and Companionship

The two most important "ingredients" for family meals are consistency and companionship. Create a mealtime routine that family members can count on, even if it is not every day. The word "companion" comes from the Latin "with bread." Companionship means being fully present with screens away and the focus on one another. Consistency and companionship are powerful.

Planning Ahead is Key

Planning ahead makes family meals easier, including: Determining when they can fit into a family's schedule, selecting the location, planning the menu, getting food on hand, making advance preparations, involving everyone in shopping, cooking, and clean-up, and committing to creating a mealtime environment that promotes positive behaviors and conversation.