



Kinship Link

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Teens and Family Meals

Pro Kinship for Kids

Inside this issue:

Teens and Family Meals continued	2
Health Tips for 2020	2

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There's something special about sitting down for family meals. Meal time is beneficial any time but is especially good as a regular time to check in with teens, making it easier to spot a problem before it gets out of hand. Whether, it's through conversation or noticing changes in your teen's behavior, regular, healthy meals can also help to manage teens' stress. Work to make family meals part of your family's routine.

Here is how family meals can help. Surveys have compared teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week) to teens who have infrequent family dinners (less than three per week). Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are: twice as likely to use tobacco, nearly twice as likely to use alcohol, and one and a half times more likely to use marijuana. Both parents and teens in these surveys viewed family meals positively, including seeing it as a positive atmosphere, an enjoyable time together, and as an occasion to talk and connect.

It's all about relationships. What is most important

about family mealtime is the conversations that can happen and connections that can be made.

Typically, teens are spending less time with family and more time with peers, so family mealtime is a natural time to be together. Although it may be easier to establish family meals when children are younger, parents of teens should not give up on the idea even if they have not had family meals in the past. The news is this, of the teens who reported infrequent dinners together, 60% said they would like to have dinner with parents more often. Here is what happened in parent-teen relationships during family dinners. Teen who had frequent family dinners were more likely to report that they talked to their parents about day to day experiences compared to those teens who had infrequent dinners. In addition, three quarters of teens said they talk to their parents about what's going on in their lives at dinner, and about three-quarters of parents agreed that by having family dinners together they learned about what was going on in their teens' lives.

Hectic lives can get in the

way of having frequent family dinners. Reasons for not having dinners are too busy, different activities, at work, and late shifts. Not knowing what to serve can also be a barrier to family meals. Family members may feel they do not have the skills to prepare a healthy meal and may rely on takeout, convenience foods, or snack items, but these will all work for family dinner is about the relationship.

But in today's busy world, the family meal may be one of the few times the family can relax and be together to share what's happening in daily life. These are some suggestions to get started:

- Start with a goal of one or two meals together per week. Once you achieve that, work toward more frequent family meals.
- Ask other family members to help with menu planning, grocery shopping, and food preparation.
- Choose a time when all or most family members can be present.
- Enlist support for having family meals from adults and kids in the home, so you can work together to get

Teens and Family Meals continued

everyone in the family on the same page.

- Turn off the television, mealtime is a time to talk with one another.
- Turn off cell phones and leave them in a different room to discourage everyone from texting or answering phone calls, and encourage all family members to be present.
- Make the time together pleasant. Encourage each family member to

talk about his or her day - try asking everyone to share the silliest thing that happened in their day, or what they are most proud of or frustrated with. Mealtime is not the time for discipline.

Don't be discouraged if family members are not receptive at first, keep trying. The message couldn't be clearer for parents. With the recent rise in the number of Americans age 12 and

older who are using drugs, it is more important than ever to sit down to dinner and engage your children in conversation about their lives, their friends, school - just talk. Ask questions and really listen to their answers. The magic that happens over family dinners isn't about the food on the table, but the communication and conversation around it.



Health Tips for 2020

1. Eat Breakfast - Start your morning with a healthy breakfast that includes lean protein, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Try making a breakfast burrito with scrambled eggs, low-fat cheese, salsa, and a whole wheat tortilla or a parfait with low-fat plain yogurt, fruit, and whole grain cereal.
2. Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Vegetables - Fruits and veggies add color, flavor, and texture plus vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber to your plate. Make 2 cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables your daily goal. Experiment with different types, including fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and veggies.
3. Watch Portion Sizes - Get out the measuring cups and see how close your portions are to the recommended serving size. Use half your plate for fruits and vegetables and the other half for grains and lean protein foods. To complete the meal, add a serving of fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt.
4. Be Active - Regular physical activity has many health benefits. Start by doing what exercise you can. Children and teens should get 60 or more minutes of physical activity per day, and adults at least two hours and 30 minutes per week. You don't have to hit the gym, take a walk after dinner or play a game of catch or basketball.
5. Get to Know Food Labels - Reading the Nutrition Facts panel can help you shop and eat or drink smarter.
6. Fix Healthy Snacks - Healthy snacks can sustain your energy levels between meals, especially when they include a combination of foods. Choose from two or more of the food groups: grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein. Try raw veggies with low-fat cottage cheese, or a tablespoon of peanut butter with an apple or banana.
7. Follow Food Safety Guidelines - Reduce your chances of getting sick with proper food safety. This includes: regular hand washing, separating raw foods from ready-to-eat foods, cooking foods to the appropriate internal temperature, and refrigerating food promptly.
8. Drink More Water - Quench your thirst with water instead of drinks with added sugars. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water, especially if you are active, an older adult, or live or work in hot conditions.
9. Get Cooking - Preparing foods at home can be healthy, rewarding, and cost effective. Master some kitchen basics, like dicing onions or cooking dried beans.
10. Dine Out without Ditching Goals - You can eat out and stick to your healthy eating plan! The key is to plan ahead, ask questions, and choose foods carefully. Compare nutrition information, in available, and look for healthier options that are grilled, baked, broiled, or steamed.
11. Banish Brown Bag Boredom - Whether it's for work or school, prevent brown bag boredom with easy-to-make, healthy lunch ideas. Try a whole-wheat pita pocket with veggies and hummus, or a low sodium vegetable soup with whole grain crackers, or a salad of mixed greens with low-fat dressing and a hard boiled egg.
12. Reduce Added Sugars - Foods and drinks with added sugars can contribute empty calories and little or no nutrition. Review the new and improved Nutrition Facts labels or ingredients list to identify sources of added sugars.
13. Eat Seafood Twice a Week - Seafood, fish, and shellfish, contain a range of nutrients including healthy omega-3 fats. Salmon, trout, oysters, and sardines are higher in omega-3 and lower in mercury.
14. Explore New Foods and Flavors - Add more nutrition and eating pleasure by expanding your range of food choices. When shopping, make a point of selecting a fruit, vegetable, or whole grain that's new to you or your family.
15. Slow Down at Mealtime - Instead of eating on the run, try sitting down and focusing on the food you're about to eat. Dedicating time to enjoy the taste and textures of foods can have a positive effect on your food intake.