

# FitFuture

strategies for better living.

## Series on Fitness & Nutrition for Families

### KIDS IN THE KITCHEN



Children love to help. Let them:

- Clear and clean the table
- Help set the table
- Turn off the TV
- Take beverage orders
- Help with certain food tasks

### GET INVOLVED



Wellness is a community effort and needs the support of the entire school community. Parents are encouraged to visit their child's school cafeteria, eat lunch or breakfast with their children and talk to a school food service professional about the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

## Family Meals Provide More than Good Nutrition By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Children from families that dine together are more likely to eat a balanced and healthy diet. They eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy and less snack foods than those who eat separately from their families. Children are also less likely to participate in unhealthy weight control practices when they regularly share meals with family.

Research shows that the importance of family mealtime also goes beyond nutrition. Family meals help solidify the family unit and provide your child with a dependable way to access YOU. These regular and routine occasions provide a sense of stability and support for each other. Mealtime reinforces safety, security and belonging—and after all, that's what makes a family a family.

Studies show that when adolescents participate in regular and frequent family meals, they are less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs<sup>1</sup>. These teens also report being content with their life and future possibilities. Academically, these adolescents achieve better grades than their counterparts.

The evidence is clear—family meals not only strengthen the parent-child bond, but they may lead to good physical and mental well-being for children. Take some time and sit down with your children today; here is some advice:

### 3 Tips That Make Family Meals Work



#### Make it a priority

Put it on your schedule just as you would with an appointment, soccer game or parent-teacher night. It's true that the modern family has many commitments, so if the dinner hour is not convenient, meet up for breakfast each morning. It's eating together that's important, not the time and place.

#### Make it simple

On weekends, shop and cook together. Make meals to freeze and reheat during the hectic week ahead. Quick meals can be healthy meals—try baked potatoes or yams topped with veggies, tomato sauce, beans and cheese. Make individual pizzas made with whole grain English muffins, veggies, tomato sauce and cheese. Stop off at your local supermarket and pick up a roasted chicken, salad and fruit for dessert.

#### Make it pleasant

Mealtime should be a time to eat and have pleasant conversation. Don't allow distractions like the television or take phone calls during this time. Discuss your day, the meal itself or plans for an upcoming event. Although it is a good time to teach proper dining behaviors and family dining rules, keep discipline to a minimum. Use this time to enjoy each other's company and a healthy meal.

Brought to you by your  
School Food Service Department

<sup>1</sup>Tami M. Videon and Carolyn K. Manning, "Influences on Adolescent Eating Patterns: The Importance of Family Meals," in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 32:365-373 (2003)

"Teens and their parents in the 21st century: an examination of trends in teen behavior and the role of parental involvement," in *U.S. Council of Economic Advisors*, (2000)

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners," (2003)

Marla E. Eisenberg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and Linda H. Bearinger, "Correlations Between Family Meals and Psychological Well-being Among Adolescents," (2004)