

Healthy Eating for Families

September is a special month for AgriLife Extension as we “Celebrate Family Mealtime”. We know everyone is busy with work and after school activities, plus technology always having us “plugged in”, often we miss face-to-face connections with our family. Family meals provide a great opportunity for family members to connect because everyone must eat!

Research shows that sitting down three times per week as a family has many benefits* among these are:

- Reduction for the odds of overweight & potentially obesity
- Reduction in eating unhealthy foods.
- Reduction in odds for a child to experience an eating disorder.
- Increase in eating healthy foods.

To get started, commit to having your family sit down at least three times a week to eat together, and use this as a time to

- share family stories,
- learn about everyone’s day,
- set family goals,
- and make plans for future activities.

Remember, meals do not have to be fancy or gourmet to make mealtime special, the focus is on getting everyone together.

At mealtime offer your family a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods and dairy or fortified soy alternatives. When deciding on foods and beverages, choose options that are full of nutrients and limited in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Begin with these tips:

Connect at mealtimes. Sit down together as a family for a meal when you can. Turn off the television and put away screens and devices, you can interact and focus on each other.

Plan out meals. Reduce stress at mealtimes by planning out meals before the week starts. Include quick and easy dishes or leftovers, on nights that are extra busy.

Let everyone help. Kids learn by doing. Younger ones can mix ingredients, wash produce, or set the table, while older kids can help with ingredients. Everyone can help clean up.

Serve a variety of foods. Include choices from each of the food groups, fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives in meals and snacks throughout the week.

Let the kids choose. Get kids engaged with meal preparation at home. Serve meals “family style” to encourage kids to be creative with their plates.

Offer nonfood rewards that kids like. Younger kids may enjoy gathering points toward a special outing and older kids could earn extra screen time or an allowance.

Be a good role model. It's hard to expect your kids to eat their vegetables if you're not eating yours. Teach your kids and show by example what healthy foods are and how much we should be eating to keep our bodies healthy.

For meal and recipe ideas visit www.dinnertonight.tamu.edu.