

Family Nutrition & The Family Dinner Table

The family dinner table is an important aspect to a healthy family lifestyle. Enjoying meals together as a family allows us time to interact with the family after what can seem like a hectic work or school day. However, there are some barriers that can create more stress at the dinner table, making dinner feel more like a chore rather than a time to bond as a family.

Common Barriers to Family Meals

- **Lack of Planning** - By failing to plan for nourishing meals, family meals often do not take place. By creating a designated day for meal planning and shopping, you will greatly increase the likelihood that these meals will become a reality. Planning for the evening meal usually begins the night before or in the morning.
- **No designated time** – A designated mealtime with family members helps with the coordination of this effort. Flexibility is essential for special occasions, but most families respond better if an established time is set.
- **Trying to make change too rapidly** – If your family is accustomed to eating most of their meals out, eating more meals at home may be more difficult than you realize. This sudden, dramatic change will not be well received. If you are eating out seven nights a week, try eating two meals at home. If you are eating dinner out five times a week, try eating four at home. Gradual change is often more realistic.
- **Making this a time for correction** – The family dinner table should be a positive experience. If you use this time to correct your children, they will learn that this is a party that they do not want to attend. Discuss positive events of the day or upcoming family activities. Criticism and unpleasant topics during meals create a stressful atmosphere.
- **Families not sharing responsibility** – If one person is responsible for the entire process, he or she will often become overwhelmed and cease to provide this special time, especially if he or she has responsibilities outside of the home. Getting others to share the responsibility is often met with resistance; but with patience and persistence, their parts will become a habit and not a subject of negotiation.



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Responsibilities That Can Be Divided

- ✓ Menu planning and creating grocery lists. This is done best as a team effort.
- ✓ Grocery shopping
- ✓ Unloading and putting away the groceries
- ✓ Preparing the food/meals
- ✓ Loading/Emptying the dishwasher or washing the dishes
- ✓ Cleaning up after meals (putting the condiments away, bringing the dishes to the sink, rinsing off the dishes)
- ✓ Setting the table before dinner

