

# Benefits of Family Meals

Eating meals as a family plays a key role in raising high-achieving, healthy and well-adjusted children.

## Improved Academic Achievement

- Frequent family meals are linked with being successful in school, including getting better grades and scoring higher on achievement tests.

## Better Nutrition

- Family meals contribute to higher daily intakes of fruit, vegetables and important nutrients like calcium, fiber, iron, vitamins B6 and B12, C and E, and less overall dietary fat.

## Higher Self-Esteem

- Mealtime conversation brings the family together, promotes positive self-esteem in children and starts a lasting and positive relationship with food.

## Making Mealtime Family Time

Family meals should be dynamic—an exchange of ideas, conversation and feelings. Mealtime is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions.

- Eat together as a family whenever possible.
- Keep mealtime pleasant—avoid power struggles over what gets eaten, and remember that mealtime is not a time for discipline.
- Turn off the TV, video games, mobile phones and the computer.
- Use conversation-starters to get children talking, such as “What is the best or worst thing that happened today at school?”



For more ideas on healthy family meals, visit [HealthyEating.org](http://HealthyEating.org).

# Be a Healthy Eating Role Model



Parents are role models and the most important influence in their children's lives.

As role models, parents need to demonstrate healthy behaviors so that their children have healthy attitudes about eating and develop healthy eating habits.

Your attitude about food and eating habits might influence your children:

- Do you skip breakfast?
- Do you drink sodas rather than milk with your meals?
- Do you diet all the time and have a fear of (or talk about) eating "bad" food?
- Do you snack all day long?
- Do you eat in front of the TV?
- Do you eat whenever you are bored or under stress?

If you answered "yes" to more than a few of these questions, you are likely sending unhealthy messages to your child about food.

## Healthy Eating Starts With Parents

Modeling healthy eating supports the development of healthy behaviors in children. Here are a few healthy eating habits parents can role model for their children:

- Never skip meals—especially breakfast.
- Take moderate portions.
- Limit junk food in the house.
- Drink water and milk instead of soda.
- Cook and prepare food with your children.
- Eat foods from all food groups—milk, fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats, fish & beans.
- Try fruit and yogurt for dessert.

## Teaching Healthy Habits at Mealtime

Children won't perceive healthy eating as important if it is not something that they see you doing.

- Eat the way you want your child to eat—try new foods together but don't force your children to try them.
- Avoid emphasizing "good" and "bad" foods—teach your child that he or she needs to balance nutritious food with fun snacks.
- Show ways for managing stress that do not include eating.
- Encourage your kids to help prepare meals, set the table and help with dishes.
- Enjoy your meals—positive attitudes are contagious!

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