

Creating a New “Normal” with Family Meals

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It seems long ago when my family was running from one activity to the next and we barely had time to sit down together for a meal. Now it feels like life has come to a screeching halt. Our days look very different: kids attending school virtually, parents working from makeshift home offices, and the cat looking for peace and quiet. It’s time to create a new “normal” while cooped up at home and we can do this by creating regular meal times, making eating time fun, and connecting through conversation.

THE PRESSURE OF IT ALL

Since most family members are home it can seem like a lot of responsibility to feel productive at work, plan and make healthy meals, be a teacher, and the entertainer. Let's face it we are doing the best we can, and you know what...that's okay! What makes life so difficult now is the lack of routine and predictability. Meal times can be one way to establish a routine.

There is over twenty years of research showing the benefits of family meals.

- Some studies show a link to reduced rates of substance abuse, depression, and obesity.
- Other studies show family meals increase fruit and vegetable intake, self-esteem, academic performance, and improve vocabulary.

The research doesn't cover the biggest win of all – precious family memories. Now is the time to embrace family meals whether that's breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Pick one meal where the whole family eats together at the same time every day.



FOODS TO FIGHT COVID-19?

Although there is no concrete evidence for specific foods or dietary patterns to prevent acute infections like Covid-19, there is evidence that maintaining a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, reducing stress, and getting adequate sleep will support a strong immune system. Use some time together to plan your scheduled daily family meal. This teaches a valuable skill and kids are more likely to make better food choices in the future.

MAKE MEAL TIME FUN!

Connecting through conversation and creativity can make meals fun. Consider:

- Conversation starters. A few great conversation starters could include, "who is your favorite superhero and why?" or "what does it mean to be brave?"
- Story telling is another great activity. Try telling stories about how you met your spouse or what you used to do as a child.
- Eat picnic-style. Meal time can be something to look forward to when you set up an indoor or outdoor picnic.
- Go digital and host a virtual dinner party with family and friends.

TIME TO EXPRESS YOURSELF

Try to keep meal time conversation positive but also allow time to express feelings. Our current situation brings about feelings of loss but it can also be a time where families can find a sense of calm and a time for introspection.

Showing kids that we can be flexible, resilient, and calm when facing uncertain times is a valuable lesson. Even more important, as parents we can show kids that we will get through this.

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