

# Family Mealtimes Work Magic



**Mary Story, RD, Phd from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health**, suggests that family meals provide an ideal time to role model behaviors we want our children to follow. Helping family members learn to cook healthy, quick meals can reduce dependency on foods and beverages that may be quick and tasty, but that do not promote health. Having regular family meals lowers the frequency of eating outside of the home, and promotes better nutritional intake. Even adolescents during their developmental time of asserting their independence, can learn to perceive family meals positively. The Minnesota study showed that the higher the frequency of family meals, the higher the intakes of fruit, vegetables and key nutrients. At the same time frequency of family meals lowered intakes of soft drinks. These beneficial habits continue all the way into adulthood.

**Want the magic to return to your home?** It may be as simple as planning family meal-times. Over the years, it's become challenging for many families to have meals together. It might be due to work schedules, extra curricular activities for young children, single parenting, increased access to convenience foods, or more meals eaten away from home. Families tend to eat better and feel better when they join in around the table to enjoy a meal. Families dining together, tend to eat more vegetables and fruits, fewer fried foods, less soda, and fewer foods with trans-fats. Younger children who eat meals with their families, are less likely to be overweight than other children. They also feel more secure and develop earlier and better language skills.

**Ellyn Satter, a respected authority** on feeding and eating says, "Everybody does better with family meals." But how do you even get started? First, change the *how* and think about the *what* later..." By "*how*," we mean looking at potential barriers regarding sitting down to family meals. How do families make these times a priority?

**Eating regular meals helps stabilize blood sugars**, increases energy levels and improves mood. Sitting at the table with others helps us eat more slowly and mindfully. When eating meals on a planned schedule, there is less tendency to obsess about food between mealtimes. Our minds are set by habit to know the next meal will be "soon".

**Teens whose families eat together** not only eat healthier foods, they also show increased self-esteem, are socially more competent and have higher academic outcomes. Social relationships that develop while eating meals with others builds a sense of community and belonging during the teen stage of insecurity. Children who eat regular family meals are less likely to gain excess weight, abuse drugs, smoke, and have sex as adolescents. In fact, family meals have more to do with raising healthy, happy children than family income, whether the child has one or two parents living in the home, after-school activities, tutors, or church.

**Make family meal-time** something to look forward to by keeping the topics around the table positive and upbeat. Want to make your **mealtime magic?** [Click here!](#)



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