

Eating Together

Eating together for family meals has benefits that go beyond healthier food choices. It provides an opportunity to spend time and talk with each other, which helps to keep families connected. Busy, varied schedules can make it challenging to eat together. Choose a meal that works for your family. For example, your family may find it easier to eat breakfast together or it may mean gathering together for a bedtime snack.

Benefits of family meals:

- Children eat a larger variety of healthier foods
- Children are twice as likely to eat the recommended 5 servings of vegetables and fruit each day
- Children consume less pop and high-fat foods
- School performance improves
- Children develop a stronger sense of belonging
- Fewer behaviour problems
- Families usually spend less money on food
- Provides parents with an opportunity to model table manners, healthy food choices, eating when hungry and stopping when full, and good listening skills
- Children get a chance to practice the skills that their parents are modelling for them
- Decreased risk of unhealthy weight control practices
- Children who eat with their family at least once a day are less likely to smoke, drink, use illegal drugs or attempt suicide

Tips for planning successful family meals:

- Schedule and make it a family routine
- Turn off all distractions - TV, phones, stereo
- Involve family members in shopping, meal preparation and clean up when possible
- Give everyone a chance to talk and be heard
- Save tough conversations for another time
- Talk and laugh together

Prepared by: Kathy Romses, RD, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Coastal Health
December 2005