



NEWS RELEASE

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Teens and Family Meals

What do nearly 80% of teens rate as one of their favorite activities to do with their parents? The answer is eating dinner at home with their parents. Eating at home with their parents surpassed eating at a fast food restaurant. They may not be able to articulate it but teenagers need a sense of unity, family ties and belonging that family meals provide. They also need that time to communicate and interact with you.

Studies have shown that teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less are at twice the risk of substance abuse as teens who have frequent family meals. Eating more family meals together is associated with lower rates of depression, suicide and school problems and higher self-esteem and school engagement.

Having family meals together is important to children of all ages. Children and teens eat healthier foods when families eat together, which contributes to healthier weights. Consistent mealtimes allow children to feel secure that they will be fed. Regular mealtimes help prevent grazing on high calorie foods and allow children to come to the table ready to eat. When families come together over meals, children are less likely to feel lonely and are less likely to eat to comfort themselves.

So, what can you do to promote family meals in your home?

- Make family meals a priority.
- Plan ahead—look at family schedules, purchase easy to prepare foods or heat and eat foods ahead of time.
- Create a positive atmosphere. Use mealtime to reconnect with each other and enjoy each other. Don't use mealtime to discipline your children.

Are you looking for some ways you can have fun and “cook up” some conversation? Try asking some questions that don't have right or wrong answers. Here are some suggestions to get the ball rolling:

- What food would you never give up eating?
- What is your favorite thing to do that doesn't cost money?
- If you owned a store what would you sell?
- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?
- Describe your dream job.
- Which of your teachers will you remember forever and why?
- Name something that you would like to learn to do someday.
- If you could have three famous friends, who would they be?
- What is the hardest thing you've ever done?
- How long could you go without watching TV?
- What is your all time favorite movie and why?
- Which would you choose: being able to fly or being invisible? Why?
- What would you like to be famous for someday?
- What can you do that nobody knows about?
- What character in a book or movie are you the most like?

Remember, eating meals together as a family is important to the positive health and development of your children and teenagers. Keep it simple, keep it fun...just keep it! Family meals not only nourish the body, they nourish the soul.

Sources: *Cookin' Up Conversation* http://www.otherwhitemeat.com/brochure/PDFs/cookinup_brochure.pdf;
The Magic of Mealtime—American Dietetics Association Annual Meeting, October 3, 2004 handout S 25-30.