

NUTRITION

On Your Own

Self-Paced Lesson

SP-000-51 1/13



Family Meals – More Than Just Eating Together

Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.

What's your family's mealtime routine?

Having sit down, family meals can help make mealtimes calmer and happier for the whole family. Experts agree that when families eat meals together regularly, their children are healthier, do better in school, have more self-confidence, and are less likely to be overweight or abuse drugs or alcohol.

Make meals and memories together. It's a lesson your child will use for life.

Think back to when you were a child. What memories come to mind when you think of family mealtimes? Write your thoughts here:

Eating meals together as a family gives you time to...

- Bond, share, connect
- Create family traditions
- Learn from one another and model good habits



IN THIS LESSON, WE'LL ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

- Why sit down and eat together as a family?
- What are some ways to make family meals happy?
- How can you make having family meals easier?
- What foods make up a healthy family meal?



“For our busy lifestyle I create a weekly menu/grocery list and prepare meals in advance to freeze and always make enough for leftovers. This forces us to eat healthier meals at home and spend more time together as a family.”

- Tia, WIC Mom

What words describe mealtimes in your family? (circle those that apply)

Bonding
Rushed
Sharing
Stressful

Complaining
Happy
Talking
Loud

Nutritious
Learning
Pleasant
Other _____

It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals. But it's worth it and the whole family eats better.

- Start eating meals together as a family when your children are young. This way, it becomes a habit.
- Try to have family meals at least four times a week. Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.
- You may not be able to eat together every day.

How to make family meals happy

- Focus on the meal and each other. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later.
- Talk about fun and happy things. Try to make meals a stress-free time. Take time to ask your child questions.
 - What made you feel really happy today?
 - What did you have to eat at lunch today?
 - What's your favorite veggie? Why?
 - Tell me one thing you learned today.
 - What made you laugh today?
- Encourage your child to try new foods. But, don't lecture or force your child to eat.

Building a Healthy Plate

It's easier than you think to build a healthy plate. Try to include healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein foods like poultry, beans, and fish. For help with planning easy family meals, visit www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.



1. Make **half** your plate fruits and vegetables.
2. Make at least **half** your grains whole grains.
3. Switch to **skim or 1% milk** (for children over 2 years of age).
4. Choose from a variety of lean protein foods.

Fast family meals

- Cook it fast on busy nights. Try stir-fried meat and vegetables, quick soups, or sandwiches.
- Do some of the work the day before. Wash and cut vegetables or make a fruit salad. Cook lean ground beef or turkey for burritos or chili. Store everything in the fridge until ready to use. Cook meals in large batches and freeze for use later.
- Eating meals made at home can help cut food costs and boost nutrition. Try some of these foods that are high in nutrition and low in cost. **Circle three foods below you would like to try.**

Food:	Serve in:
Brown rice	side dishes, stir fry, casseroles, soups, and stews
Whole wheat pasta	hot or cold pasta dishes
100% whole wheat bread	hot or cold sandwiches, bread stuffing, or on the side
Old-fashioned oats	hot or cold cereal, muffins, and granola
Beans	burritos, dips, enchiladas, soups, or side dishes
Eggs	omelets, quiches, and egg casseroles
Canned tuna	sandwiches, casseroles, salads, or serve with crackers
Flank steak	broiled or grilled or in fajitas and stir fry
Sweet potatoes	side dishes, casseroles, or stews
Bananas	a snack or with breakfast, in breads, muffins, or smoothies
Frozen vegetables	side dishes, casseroles, and stews
Canned tomatoes or marinara	pasta dishes, pizza, sandwiches, and stews
Fresh bagged spinach	salads, casseroles, soups, stews, and egg dishes

Quick Dinners in a Hurry

- ✓ Cook spinach, tomatoes, and beans in a small amount of oil and serve on top of cooked brown rice.
- ✓ Make a stir fry using flank steak or chicken, frozen vegetables, and teriyaki sauce mixed with brown rice.
- ✓ Bake a tuna casserole using cooked whole wheat pasta, chunk light tuna packed in water, low-fat cream of mushroom soup, and mixed vegetables.
- ✓ Brown up some lean ground turkey with veggies (like onions, mushrooms, zucchini, or chopped spinach), mix with marinara sauce, and serve with whole wheat spaghetti.

Family Meals - More Than Just Eating Together

Self-Paced Lesson Survey / SP-000-51

CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. List one reason family meals are important to you.

2. **True or False?** Children who eat family meals regularly are healthier, get better grades, and are less likely to be overweight or abuse drugs or alcohol.

3. Name at least one thing you could do to make your family meals easier or happier.

4. Think back to MyPlate and fill in the blanks:

- a. Make _____ your plate fruits and vegetables.
- b. Make at least _____ your grains whole grains.
- c. Switch to _____ milk when your child is 2 years old.

5. Use the MyPlate graphic below to plan a healthy meal. Write down the food items in the box to the right.



Vegetable:

Fruit:

Grain:

Protein:

Dairy:

Challenge yourself to eat one more family meal a week. Fill in the statement below and commit to a healthier family:

On _____, I plan to serve _____ for my family at _____. We will sit down together to eat, and I will turn off the television and phones.

_____ (my signature)

Now talk about this lesson with a WIC staff member.

Be sure to take this sheet home. Put it where you will see it every day to remind you why family meals are important.