

# To Your Health

## **Slow Down - Enjoy Dinner**

A relaxed family dinner offers real benefits for adults and children. Several studies confirm that leisurely eating leads to feeling fuller with less food. So, if you eat more slowly you tend to consume fewer calories at mealtime, which should lead to weight loss, and improved weight management. When families eat five or more meals together per week, young people tend to have more success in school, fewer eating problems, low substance abuse rates, and less depression.

Want advantages like these for **your** family?

Here are four ways to make mealtimes matter:

**Give your family meals the time and attention they deserve.**

It takes approximately 20 minutes from the time you start eating for your brain to send out signals of fullness.

Give your family the gift of leisure. Allow at least 25 to

30 minutes for an evening meal wherever you eat.

**Get the whole family involved in dinner - from start to finish.** The evening meal doesn't have to be one person's responsibility. Even very young children like being involved in planning and preparing meals. Assign age-appropriate jobs, like choosing the fruit for dessert, mixing pre-cut vegetables into a salad, setting the table with unbreakable dishes/glasses, or clearing the dishes afterwards.

**Create a pleasant, distraction-free zone at the dinner table.** Of all the things that can quickly improve mealtime atmosphere, this is undoubtedly the most important. Ask the whole family to turn off their electronic gizmos (TV, DVD, PDA, computer, radio, MP3 player, non-emergency cell phones) for just 30 minutes. Background music is fine - at a low volume. The goal is to provide a relatively quiet time to enjoy food and being together. A low stress mealtime environment helps to control overeating and to improve digestion after eating.

**Make family conversations the centerpiece of your time together.** Pleasant conversations make good meals even better. They help young children expand their vocabulary and other language skills. They help adults learn what is really going on in the lives of young people. They help everyone feel more secure and connected in a confusing and often overwhelming world.

**Need some help planning healthy menus?** Visit USDA's totally new, totally free MyPyramid menu planning tool at [www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner](http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner). Using your age, gender, weight, height, and level of physical activity, the planner assesses how balanced your current eating habits are and offers small changes to help tip the scales in a healthier direction. MyPyramid Menu Planner is designed for busy people who want to track their calorie intake and the quality of their food choices and then make realistic improvements.

Source: *Eat Right Montana*, April 2008 .. a coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles

## Safe, Healthy Meat Grilling Tips

Grilling - a naturally low fat cooking method for your favorite meats. The key is - avoid overcooking or charring any meat (poultry, red meat or fish) with any cooking method at high temperatures. Cooking protein-rich foods like meat, poultry and fish at very high temperatures can create chemicals that some scientists hypothesize may increase cancer risk.

### Meat grilling suggestions:

- Go lean, and trim fat to prevent flare-ups and excessive smoke.
- Marinades add flavor and can tenderize less tender cuts of beef. Marinades with little or no sugar may help protect meat from charring. Use medium heat while cooking for the most delicious flavorful meat.
- Avoid grilling over hot fires that char the outside of the meat.
- Determine optimum doneness by using a meat thermometer. Lean beef's tender and juicy texture is optimum, for instance, when cooked to medium rare (145°F) or medium doneness (160°F).
- Cook burgers to medium (160°F) doneness, until no longer pink in the center and juices show no pink color.
- Turn meat occasionally for even cooking and browning.

Source: "Beef Briefs," Spring 2008, IA Beef Industry Council

---

**Did you know:** The number of calories adult Americans consume from beverages nearly doubled from 1965 to 2002, for an average added 222 liquid calories per day.

*Is it time to re-think **your** beverage choices?*

## On Your Mark, Get Set...

Like millions of Americans, you probably put in a fair amount of "screen time" - whether it's in front of a computer working or relaxing in front of the television. Unfortunately all that screen time can mean a whole lot of inactivity.

You don't need to start running marathons or rock climbing. You **do** need to **get active**, though! Aside from making you healthier, regular physical activity can put you in a better mood and make you more mentally alert. Regular, moderate physical activity can also help reduce your risk for various diseases.

Source: *Because WeCare*, American Cancer Society, May 2008

**Play together:** When planning family celebrations, try focusing on fun activities instead of food. Most of us cherish the time our parents spent with us more than the gifts they gave or the food they served. When gift-giving, look for ones that encourage activity.

**Make time for exercise:** Time - none of us have as much as we want. Breaking big projects into smaller pieces is one way to get more done. And that includes physical activity. Three 10-minute walks a day (at a brisk pace) are one way to start. Walking to work or a lunch time stretching class are others.

Source: *Food and Fun for Healthy Families*, ISU Extension 2008 nutrition calendar

---

Additional sources of information:

[www.extension.iastate.edu/food](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/food)

[www.extension.iastate.edu/healthnutrition](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/healthnutrition)