

FAMILY MEAL TIME:

AN IMPORTANT TRADITION FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

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Who am I?

- Registered dietitian/nutrition for 32 years
 - I see patients for many different nutrition diagnoses, but I specialize in eating disorders, diabetes, kidney disease among other nutrition problems
- Certified Diabetes Care & Education Specialist for 29 years
- Registered nurse for 9 years

I have seen the terrible consequences of families not engaging in meal time. We need to get back to the dinner table together!

Why is it important to eat meals together as a family?

Homecooked meals are more nutritious.

- Fewer calories, smaller portions than restaurant meals, lower fat content.
- Kids are less likely to drink soda with a meal at home
 - Research is showing a direct link between sugared beverage consumption and risk of diabetes. Cases of Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes in children is exploding.
- Homecooked meals provide more fruits, veg., protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals
- Linked to lower rates of obesity and better heart health
- Reduction in asthma sx's
 - Less anxiety that can induce an asthma attack, parents have more opportunity to check in to see if their child has taken their asthma medication, homecooked meals have fewer preservatives or allergenic ingredients
- Kids become adults who are healthy eaters and less likely to be overweight or underweight. **THUS:** this is an investment in lifelong health



Why is it important to eat meals together as a family?



- Homecooked meals = smarter kids and more likely academic success
- Younger kids develop a higher vocabulary, even better than reading to them (discussion at the dinner table). Know more words = read earlier and more easily
- Higher grades and achievement scores. Having family dinners = stronger predictor of academic accomplishment than doing homework, playing a sport or doing art.
- Teens who eat dinner at home 5-7x per week are twice as likely to earn A's in school compared to kids who eat with their families fewer than 3x per week.



Why is it important to eat meals together as a family?

- Homecooked meals are good for mental health
- Kids have a decrease in high-risk behaviors (substance abuse, smoking, eating disorders, and behavioral problems in school).
- Lower rates of depression and suicidal thoughts
- Teens who were victims of cyberbullying bounced back more quickly.
- More powerful deterrent against high-risk teen behaviors than getting good grades or going to church.
- When teens have frequent family dinners, they are more likely to have an upbeat mood and more optimistic view of the future compared to their peers who don't eat with parents.



It's not really about the food, even though an important part is nutrition



- Reliable time for parents and kids to connect with each other.
 - How much time do you all spend at home vs. work and school?
- Helps you detect problems/conflicts in your child's life early.
- Face-to-face is important. Children need to feel seen and known by parents. They are less at risk for depression and anxiety.
- Great time to tell stories. Family stories about parents'/grandparents' childhoods, experiences, learning new things, and overcoming adversity help kids feel connected to something bigger than themselves. Kids who can tell stories are also better readers, more empathetic and emotionally intelligent.
 - Embedded in these family stories are lessons about mistakes, risks, and growth. Also, the family dinner time is a chance for humor and laughter because of the connections we develop.



What constitutes a “family meal”?

- Even if only 2 family members can eat together, connecting & enjoying each other...
- It can be takeout. The human interaction and connection is the primary goal.
- It's better if TV is off, but if there is a special program on during the dinner hour, it can induce conversation. Or record it and watch it later.
- Even if it's not as often as is recommended. Even one positive dinnertime together is beneficial and can help motivate you/kids to do it more often.
- It doesn't have to be dinner. If it works better for your schedule to do breakfast, lunch, or the bedtime snack then that's great! The goal is to find as many opportunities as you can and make them positive together-time.



Some of the barriers people have found to be challenging to overcome:

- Lack of time
- The hard work of making dinner
- Kids who are picky eaters
- Conflict or tension between family members
- Teens who don't want to eat with their parents



Lack of time

- Good, Better, Best
 - Make the family dinner hour (or breakfast or lunch...) a PRIORITY.
- We're not talking about gourmet meals every night. Make it simple when you can't do more.
- How many activities do families really need to engage in?
- How many sports, music, dance.... Is really benefitting you/your kids to the detriment of eating a meal together. You get to choose. Really.



Tips for making dinner prep less work

- It needs to be a group effort. Mom can't do it all. Dads can cook too. Kids need to learn. They will someday be on missions, at college, starting their own families. Cooking is an important life skill.
 - Kids have increased self-esteem when they help, even with cleanup.
- Make double or triple on a night you have more time. Then food can be frozen and reheated on another night for a quicker meal.
- Keep your kitchen stocked with essentials that can allow a quickly cooked meal
 - Pasta, bottled pasta sauce, rice, canned goods, frozen foods, eggs, cheese
- Short cuts are okay – salad kits, rotisserie chicken, pre-cut vegies, frozen pizza dough.
- Use a slow cooker, crockpot, air fryer, Instantpot.



Tips for feeding picky eaters (if there are no medical reasons for their pickiness)

- Refrain from dictating what and how much your child will eat. Allow your kids to decide for themselves. You as the parent(s) are in charge of the schedule and food environment in the home. It is the child's job to decide whether they eat or how much. Don't engage in power struggles over food.
- Be a good role model. Eat a variety of food with enjoyment, kids usually will follow along.
- Don't use food as a reward. "if you eat your spinach, you can have ice cream." You will make the spinach less appealing and the ice cream more so.
- Kids need to be exposed to a food as many as 15 times before they will accept it. Also introduce new foods early and continue to offer them. Tastes change over time. Continued exposure sometimes helps them feel familiar and less likely to continue rejecting them.
- Offer a new food with a favorite food. If your child likes peas, throw in some carrots. If they enjoy French fries, serve fruit also.
- Allow your child to explore food by touching it, mashing it, putting olives on their fingers, etc. This allows kids to be less fearful of trying new foods.
- Allow kids to help in the kitchen. They can be asked to contribute to the menu, choose a recipe, help choose food at the store, help to cook, set the table, clear the dishes. Kids are more likely to eat foods they help prepare.
- Make a dish that each family member can alter themselves – tacos, pizza, Hawaiian haystacks...
- Don't allow excessive snacking or they won't be hungry at meal time.
- Don't be a short order cook. If the child doesn't want to eat what is prepared, offer a less appealing alternative. And limit how often they can choose a different food. There needs to be an unstated expectation that they will eat what is prepared.

Tension and Conflicts at the Dinner Table

- This time together should not be fraught with negative emotion.
- Avoid punishing or shaming kids about grades or behavior during this time. Avoid topics that can end in an argument.
- Teach manners without exerting undue supervision and critique about their use of utensils or other manners.
- Prior to the meal, engage kids in its planning and preparation.
- Play games
- Tell stories



Do you think your teens would rather not eat with you?



- Scientific surveys have shown that teens typically value their relationships with parents and want to spend time with them. 80% say they would rather have dinner with their families than by themselves or with friends.
- Teens report that dinner time is when they are most likely to talk to their parents. We think this is why families who routinely have dinner together provide protection for teens against high-risk behaviors.
- Dinner is a time for teens to open up about their interests, friends, music.
- Teens can be in charge of a meal to explore new cuisine.
- Teens can perhaps be allowed to share a play list of their favorite songs to be played during dinner. Allow them to invite a friend to dinner or dessert once a week.
- Humanize yourself with your teen. Share times you struggled with grades or with a difficult teacher. Explore solutions together. Ask your teen for solutions for difficult situations in the family.
- Limit technology at the dinner table. Everyone needs to agree on the rules. This is a time to focus on each other, not electronic devices.

If you are single...



- There is benefit of creating a dinner club and inviting others to take turn cooking. You can do this as often or infrequent as you like. We are social beings and need to be with others.
- Remember that the connections you make are probably more important than the food served.

How to do meal planning

- Make a list of entrees your family enjoys.
- Make a list of side dishes that contain grains or starches.
- Make a list of fruits and vegetables.
- Decide how many days you plan to cook, and choose which days of the week you will cook.
- Plan who is in charge of the meal. You? Spouse? Teenager?
- Assign entrees to the days you have chosen, then add in side dishes, vegetables and fruits. You can also plan a “free” night where everyone can choose their own food from what is available in the home, or a night for pizza or take-out.
- Create a shopping list from the menus. Purchase all ingredients so you are ready to cook anything on the week’s menu. This give you flexibility to prepare a different entree at the last minute if desired.

Meal Plans

Breakfast	Lunch	Snacks
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Dinner

Make your own meal plan template or find one online

MEAL PLAN TEMPLATE

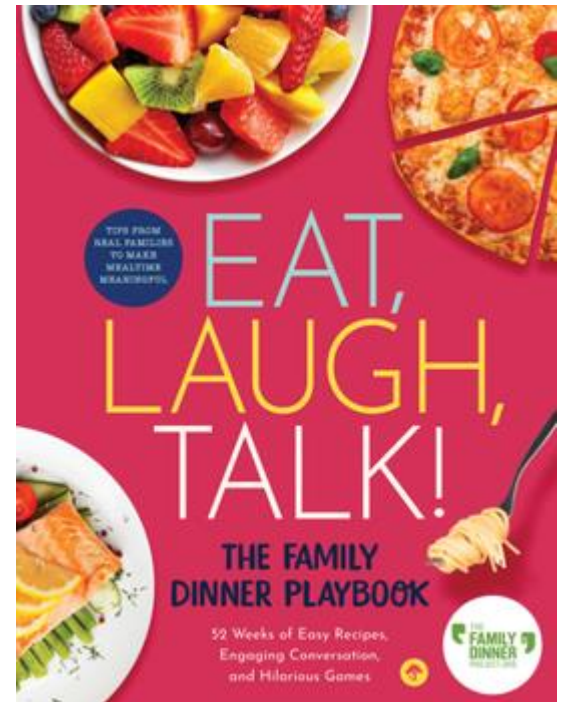
Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				
SUNDAY				

Resources for Families

Eat, Laugh, Talk! The Family dinner Playbook – 52 weeks of easy recipes, engaging conversation, and hilarious games

This book can be purchased online at many different places such as Amazon, Thriftbooks, ebay, etc. Just google the title.

They also have a website – Thefamilydinnerproject.org where you can find recipes, ideas for conversation starters, and fun games to play during meal time. You don't have to buy the book.



Resources for Parents

- Books by Ellyn Satter, world-renowned dietitian
- Links to her website – has a lot of free information about feeding children throughout different developmental stages.
 - [Help for achieving joyful, sensible, confident eating and feeding](#)
 - [Make meals worthwhile; eat food you enjoy](#)

YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT HELPING WITHOUT HARMING

BIRTH THROUGH ADOLESCENCE



ELLYN SATTER
MS RD LCSW BCD

Ellyn Satter's Child of Mine



*Nurturing a Confident
and Joyful Eater*

Feeding with Love and Good Sense: The First 2 Years



Ellyn Satter
Dietitian and Family Therapist

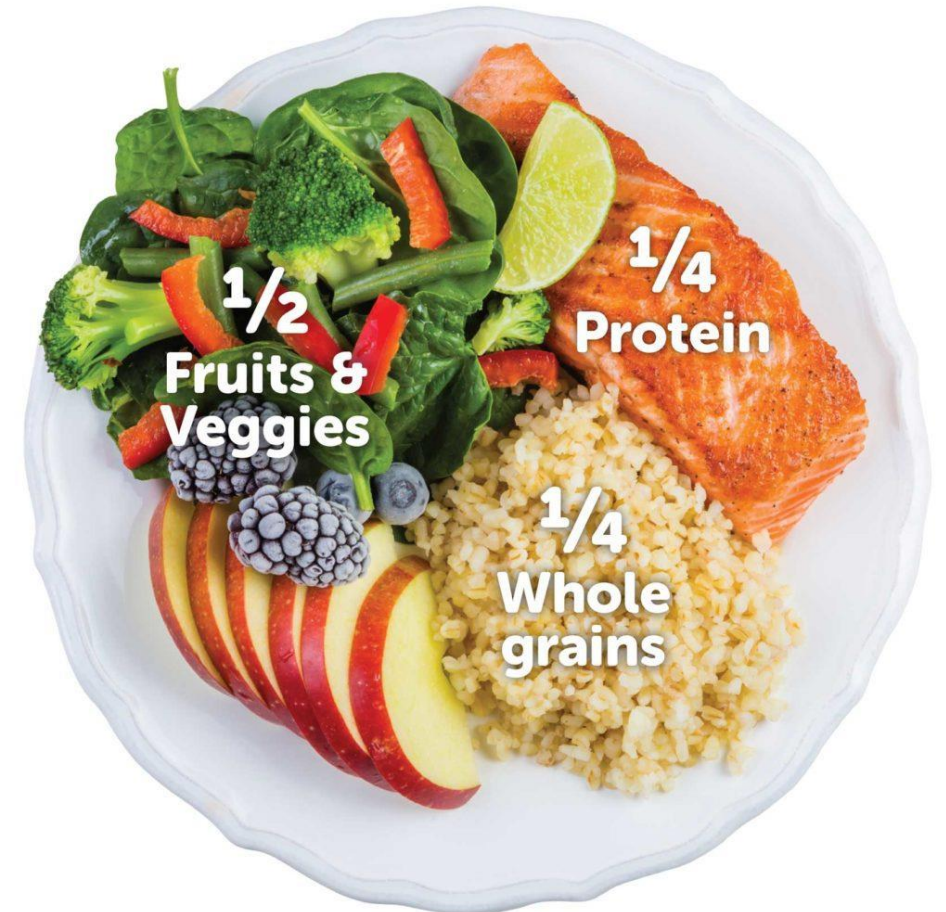
SECRETS OF FEEDING A HEALTHY FAMILY *How To Eat, How To Raise Good Eaters, How To Cook*



Ellyn Satter
Author of Child of Mine, Feeding With Love and Good Sense

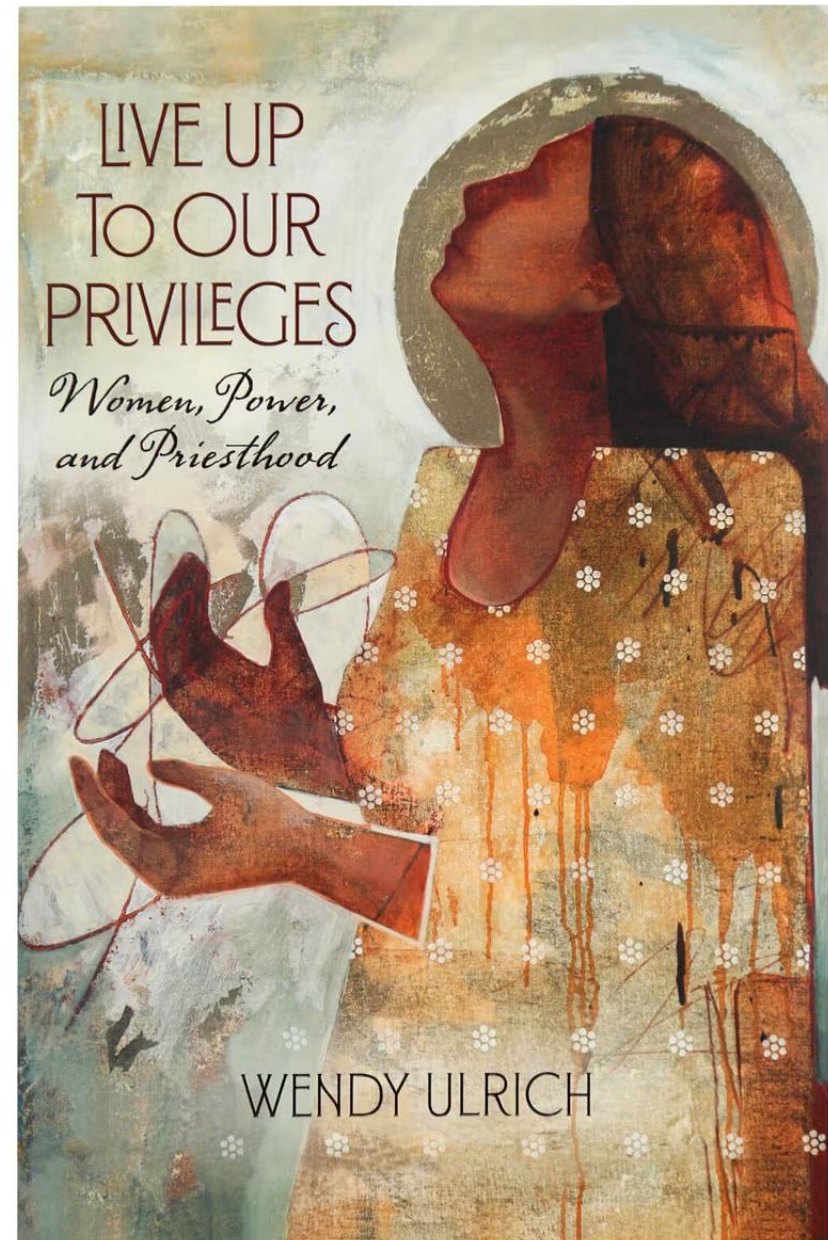
Resources for Families

- <https://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/17947/mealtimes/dinner/>
- <https://www.allrecipes.com/>
- <https://www.tasteofhome.com/>
- <https://diabetesfoodhub.org/> - recipes for diabetes
- <https://www.davita.com/diet-nutrition> – recipes for chronic kidney disease
- <https://www.eatright.org/> - The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



A reading recommendation...

Sister Wendy Ulrich wrote a book with an excellent chapter and discussion on the importance of meals and human connection in the context of the gospel, our responsibility to nourish our children/family, and the importance of nourishing emotional connections with each other.



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Thank you!

ANY QUESTIONS???

