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Family Meal Times

Issue 4

Family Fun at the Dinner Table

At the Family Table

Recreation. Dinner. How do these family activities go together? Since family mealtimes bring families together, they're also a great time for family fun and games.

Laughter and learning are important in healthy family life, and combining family meals with fun and games is a great way to invite laughter into the home.



Get Everyone Involved

Family meals become more memorable when you get everybody involved at the dinner table. Our memories are associated with our experiences. Playing games or doing activities at a family meal can create specific memories for family members. Try these activities:

- Have every person share the favorite thing that happened to them that day. Do this once or twice a week. Allow everyone to take turns and encourage questions.
- Play a "family game" that all can participate in and enjoy (word games, charades, cards, etc.).

Family Fun and Games for All

Playing family games limits distractions (TV, etc.) and allows family members to interact with each other in a fun and engaging manner. Consider these ideas:

- Play a "20 questions" game where one person thinks of a place (e.g., Paris), animal (e.g., giraffe) or person, and others try to guess the answer by asking "yes or no" questions, such as, if it's an animal, "Does it live in the ocean?" or "Can it fly?" Family members can take turns thinking up the person, place or animal to be discovered.
- Play a word game, a guessing game, card game or charades (act out a book or movie title, etc.).

Mix Meals With Outdoor Recreation

Some meals that are remembered most are part of a picnic, hike or campout. Try the following ideas:

- Take kids on a day hike and pack a picnic lunch.
- Head to the park for a game of tag, Frisbee or other activity. Bring sandwich ingredients and make a meal on the spot when you are done.
- Visit a state or national park. Engage in the learning opportunities, get active and bring along some healthy snacks.

A Memory of Family Meals

"My dad would try to be funny sometimes and call the salad 'hay' and a spoon or fork a 'hammer.' He called Parmesan cheese 'floor dry' because it soaked up the grease."

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Food and Family Q&A

Question: ***To get meals on the table fast, I use some convenience foods such as packaged mixes. Some are high in fat and sodium. Is there anything I can do to make them healthier?***

Watch your portion sizes, and consider these ideas to reduce fat, calories and sodium:

- Packaged macaroni and cheese: Follow the lower-fat directions on some boxes – or use half the amount of butter or margarine.
- Boxed brownie mixes: Substitute unsweetened applesauce for half the oil. For example, if the recipe calls for ½ cup oil, use ¼ cup applesauce and ¼ cup oil.
- Canned spaghetti sauce or cream soups: Add vegetables, such as grated carrots.
- Frozen pizza: Add chopped vegetables before baking.
- Seasoned rice, pasta or stuffing mixes: Use half the seasoning packet to reduce sodium.

A Family Meal Recipe

Pizza in a Sandwich

6 8-inch French bread rolls
1 pound lean ground beef
½ c. chopped peeled onion
14 ounces pizza sauce
¼ c. sliced black olives
2 tsp. crushed dried basil
1 tsp. crushed dried oregano
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. ground black pepper
3 c. shredded mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 375 F. Cut rolls in half lengthwise and hollow out insides within ½ inch of edges. Set aside. In a skillet over medium-high heat, cook meat and onion until brown. Drain. Stir in pizza sauce, olives, basil, oregano, salt and pepper. Cook until thoroughly heated; remove from heat. Sprinkle half the cheese into bottom of each roll. Spoon meat mixture over cheese. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and replace tops. Wrap in foil and bake for 20 minutes. Serve warm.

Makes six servings.
Each serving has 350 calories, 10 grams (g) fat, 35 g protein, 29 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 1,150 milligrams sodium.

Menu Idea

Pizza in a Sandwich, garden salad, canned pineapple chunks and low-fat milk

Quick Tip: Set a goal for increasing family meals and write it on the family calendar!

Eat Smart. Play Hard. Together

For more information about food and families, visit this NDSU Extension website: **www.ag.ndsu.edu/food**

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