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Family Meal Times

Issue 1

Family Meals Matter

At the Family Table

Life often is too busy. Far too busy. Too busy to sit down and relax for a few minutes. Too busy to share a story from the day. Too busy to eat something you'd actually enjoy. Too busy to connect with a spouse, kids or other family members.

But we have one place we can slow things down and capture the time, relaxation and connection that each of us needs — **at the family table**.



Why Family Meals Matter

Think about the time we can spend together at the family table and the experiences we can share:

- Share stories
- Lend a listening ear
- Play games
- Try new foods
- Laugh out loud
- Teach manners
- Savor tastes and smells
- Learn new ideas

Regular family meals are linked with many positive benefits for individuals and families. Family meals provide an opportunity for shared communication, lasting family connections, healthier nutrition and reduced risk behaviors by children.

Prioritizing Family Meals

Making regular family meals a priority is important. Not every meal has to be a sit-down dinner extravaganza. Simplify your menus, and focus on making family meals **frequent, fun** and **family-centered**.

Set a goal to eat together **frequently**. Research suggests more than half of families with children in the U.S. share a meal five or more times a week. That's good!

A concern, however, is that 30% to 35% of families often eat less than three meals a week together, which means less time for connecting and communicating.

Make **fun** a part of the recipe for a happy mealtime. Mealtime is not a disciplinary occasion. Instead, focus on being together in a positive way.

A **family-centered** mealtime means limiting the distractions, especially the TV or computer, and engaging each family member during a meal.

Take Back Your Time

Prioritize opportunities for enjoyment, sharing and relaxation through family meals. Think of the family table as a recipe for success!

A Memory of Family Meals

"I grew up in a large family with eight of us at the table. When the food was passed to you, you'd better be sure you took some or it would be gone and you wouldn't get a second chance!"

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Food and Family Q&A

Question: ***With meetings, sports practices and dance lessons, our schedules never seem to match around dinnertime. Any suggestions?***

Focus on meals together as a family, but remember they do not have to be at a specific time of day or in a certain place. A family meal doesn't have to happen only in the evening hours. As a busy family, you might find time to eat breakfast together in the mornings, share an evening snack or enjoy midday meals on weekends.

Be flexible. Try to set aside some regular times each week for family meals, such as on Sunday and Monday nights. Making family meals a priority helps juggle other things around it.

Quick Tip: Save time going back and forth to the trash while cooking by having a "trash bowl" on the counter. Throw all peelings, trimmings, etc., in this bowl and make one trip to the trash when you are finished.

A Family Meal Recipe

Hawaiian Chicken

1 tsp. oil or margarine
2½ pounds chicken, boneless and skinless
¼ tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. pepper
1 (6-ounce) can pineapple juice, frozen concentrate
2 c. water

Thaw the pineapple juice. Grease a large frying pan. Heat the pan on low. Put the chicken parts in the hot pan. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cook until the chicken begins to brown. Add the defrosted pineapple juice to the pan. Swish the water in the can and add it to the pan. Cover and cook slowly, turning now and then, for 50 minutes or until the chicken is fork-tender and reaches 165 F.

Put the chicken on a warm platter. Skim the fat from the chicken juices in the pan. Boil down the juices until they are slightly thickened (about 5 minutes). Return the chicken to the pan. Reheat it for a few minutes.

Makes five servings.
Each serving has 300 calories, 7 grams (g) fat, 51 g protein, 5 g carbohydrate, 0 g fiber and 220 milligrams sodium.

Menu Idea

Hawaiian Chicken, wild rice blend, green beans, canned peaches and low-fat milk

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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