



Extension Nutrition Programs

FSNEP/EFNEP

10 Tips for Quality Family Meals

If you're like most families, you're caught in a time crunch. Jobs, school, sports, homework, a house to clean, and clothes to wash and dry.

Before you decide to dine together as a family, think about your family priorities. Consider dropping at least one thing from your busy schedule **BEFORE** you add family meals.

Just sitting together at the table doesn't always lead to fascinating family conversations or warm mealtime memories. Here are some ideas for building family traditions, improving nutrition and reducing stress.

1. Start Slow, Learn as You Go

If you eat no meals together, now, just add one meal a week. Families usually report enjoying eating meals together after they try it.

2. It's Not "What" But "How" You Feed Your Family

Simple foods served with love and laughter will outshine gourmet food.

3. It Doesn't Have to Be Hot

Tuna sandwiches, an apple and milk can be just as healthy as hot food you worked for hours to prepare.

4. Involve Children in Making Meals

Children, especially younger children, enjoy meals they help fix. If everyone is hungry and in a hurry when they get home, try preparing meals on the weekend. Or, prepare something for the next day **AFTER** the meal.

5. Food Choice vs. Forcing Food

Serious family conflicts occur between parents and children when children are forced to eat. A parent's role is to offer a child safe, healthful food. Offer food on a regular schedule (every 2 hours for young children). A child's role is to decide to eat the food or not and how much to eat. If a child does not eat the food in a reasonable amount of time, take the food away.



6. Cook it Quick but Eat It Slow

Though you may hurry meal preparation time, allow ample time to enjoy the meal with your family.

7. Table Talk Tips

Share positive things that have happened during the day. One family had a mealtime ritual where everyone told one new thing learned that day – including mom and dad!

Some families have a night where there's an assigned table topic. Here are some popular ideas:

- Describe something that happened recently which made you feel really happy.
- Someone gave you \$1,000. You have to spend some of it on your family before you can buy anything for yourself. What would you buy for everyone?
- If you could live in a different time and place, where and when would you want to live?
- If you could spend an afternoon with a famous person (living or dead) who is your pick?

If everyone in your family talks at once, take a tip from the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood. They suggest Borrowing the "talking stick" idea from Native Americans. Only the person holding the stick can talk. You might have a "talking cup" or other special item that gets passed around.

8. Don't Answer the Phone at Meals

How often does the phone interrupt your meals? If you can't stand to ignore a ringing phone, unplug it, turn off the ringer, use an answering machine or voice mail, or tell people you will call back after dinner. If you need to answer calls immediately, such as those from an ill parent, get caller I.D.

9. Turn the TV Off

Encourage family members to star in their own lives and relate to each other rather than to some image on the TV screen. If there is an "absolutely must see" show that occurs during dinnertime, tape it for later viewing.

10. Make Mealtimes Matter

Take the time to sit down and enjoy meals with your family several times a week!



Ten Tips was adapted from Anne Henneman, R.C., University of Nebraska, Cooperative Extension. Produced by the Nutrition Education Network of Washington, Washington State University and U. S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service.

The programs of the Montana State University Extension Service are available to all people regardless of race, creed, color, sex, handicap or national origin.

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, David A. Bryant, Dean and Director, Extension Service, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717.

* FSNEP is brought to you by U.S.D.A. Food and Nutrition Service, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, and MSU Extension Service.