



Strong Families Eat Together

Try Easy Steps to Make Mealtime Meaningful Family Time

Judy Matlick, WVU Extension Service Agent, Jefferson County



**Family meals are
important;
make them a priority**

Build bonds, health

**Begin with one;
then build**

**Make family
mealtime fun**

Find more information

Even though today's lifestyle makes having family meals more difficult, multiple benefits to your family – especially to your children – make it worthwhile to arrange to have some meals together as a family every week.

If your family is not currently eating together regularly, make family meals a family priority. West Virginia University Extension Service families and health educators encourage parents to discover the benefits of family mealtime.

Research continues to affirm that family mealtime builds strong family bonds while having a positive influence on family communications, nutrition intake, new and old family traditions, childhood obesity, and character and social development.

Begin small. Then, add one more family meal each week. Keep it simple. Strive for healthy – not elaborate – meals.

Use a weekly calendar. Record all upcoming events of each family member and decide which meals – breakfast, lunch, dinner – can be family gatherings. Choose days that are during the week or on the weekend.

- Combine a family activity and a family meal. This might be dinner after a worship service or a simple picnic lunch during a family bike ride or walk.
- Have family members take turns planning and preparing meals. Ask family members to work as teams and to include even young children.
- To increase variety in meals, make it a family project to learn about and prepare a new vegetable or other food.
- Have an indoor picnic or meal that reminds family members of a favorite family vacation or another pleasant event.
- Make the family meal a special project. Do a favor for a shut-in family member or friend. Prepare extra food and take a meal to that person or invite that person to join your family for the meal.
- Turn off the TV and take turns selecting background music. Also turn off cell phones and let the answering machine deal with the telemarketers that often call during mealtime.
- Every once in a while, get out the good dishes you never use and eat by candlelight. Even the simplest meal is special on pretty dishes.

www.ext.wvu.edu

Call WVU Extension Service Families and Health Programs at 304-293-2796.

Revised September 2010

This WVU-ES Families and Health Programs article was prepared by Judy Matlick, MA, CFCS (Certified in Family and Consumer Sciences), an Extension agent with the West Virginia University Extension Service.