

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Sharing Meals Makes Families Healthier**

Want to improve your family's physical health? How often are you eating together? Well planned family meals can improve your family's nutritional intake and physical condition. Research has shown that families who eat together regularly are more likely to have healthier weights.

Currently in West Virginia, nearly half (48 percent) of our state's students are overweight or obese, and 25 percent are in danger of being at-risk for heart disease because of high cholesterol.

To improve the cardiac condition of you and your loved ones, West Virginia University Extension Service Families and Health Programs educators encourage parents to discover the benefits of family mealtime.

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

Start with a weekly calendar. Record all upcoming events of each family member and decide which meals – breakfast, lunch, and dinner – can be family gatherings. Choose days during the week or on the weekend. Shoot for five meals each week – any 20-minute meal counts!

Combine a family activity and a family meal. This might be dinner after a school event or a simple picnic lunch during a family bike ride or walk.

Have family members take turns planning and preparing meals. Ask them 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.

WVU Extension Service's Love Your Heart Movement is adapted from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's campaign and is targeted to help West Virginians become educated and enabled to take charge of their own health.

To learn more about the value of family meals, contact your local WVU Extension Service county office or visit www.ext.wvu.edu.

—WVU-ES —

1/2014