

Extension Education
Laurie Bates News Column
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The Importance of Eating Meals Together

By Laurie Bates

There are few greater investments parents and individuals can make than sitting down together and sharing a meal. Let's bring back this lost tradition to our homes and reap all the known benefits, which are:

- Eat an overall healthier diet
- Spend less money on fast food
- Consume more fruits and vegetables
- Maintain a healthier body weight
- Engage in conversation
- Enjoy and strengthen couple and family bonds

Children are less likely to engage in risky behaviors including tobacco, drug, and alcohol use, struggle with eating disorders or experience depression or low self-esteem.

While some of the benefits of family mealtime are more significant for those that eat three or more meals together weekly, adding just one mealtime to your routine is a great place to start. Remember, family mealtime is not only for dinner-it can be whichever meal works best for your family's schedule. Planning and preparing the meal as a family creates even more time together.

Family mealtimes should be and can be happy times for children and for the whole family. Meal times should be a time for family interest in the individual's activities and for family communication. Family mealtime should be kept on a positive note.

Follow these helpful tips for family mealtime:

- Plan meals ahead of time.
- Set time aside each week to menu plan. The amount of time will decrease as you practice. Ask family members for ideas of what they would like to eat.
- Schedule a set time for meals. Planning a schedule that everyone can see will help in setting a time for meals. A set time makes it easier to remember for family members.
- Involve all family members in the meal planning, preparation and clean up.
- Involving family in mealtime planning and cooking instills a love for delicious homemade food and teaches skills that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.
- Unplug your dinner-no television, phones or other devices allowed!

Dinner in a Pumpkin

Ingredients:

2 lbs. ground beef

1 cup water

3 potatoes, cut into 1" cubes

4 carrots, sliced

1 green pepper, 1/2" slices

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 onion, chopped

2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
2 Tablespoons beef bouillon granules
1 (14.5 oz.) can diced tomatoes
1 pumpkin (10-12 lbs.)

Directions: In a medium pan, brown ground beef, rinse and drain. Add beef back to pan and add water, potatoes, carrots, green pepper, garlic, onion, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 1 hour. Stir in bouillon and add tomatoes

Wash pumpkin and cut an 8" circle around the top stem. Remove top and set aside. Take out seeds and loose fibers from inside the pumpkin. Place pumpkin in shallow pan. Spoon beef mixture into pumpkin and replace stem. Brush outside of pumpkin with olive oil. Bake at 325° for 2 hours or until the pumpkin is tender. Serve by scooping out a little pumpkin with each serving.