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Make Family Meals a Tradition

Are you among the minority of American families who eat at least one meal together every day? In today's fast-paced world, eating Sunday dinner as a family is a great tradition. Still, it is a giant step away from more regular or daily time spent eating and socializing around the table – which was the norm just one generation ago. Why all the fuss about sitting down together for a routine that may only last 15-20 minutes? The benefits are actually numerous.

Utah State University Extension's Create Better Health Utah (SNAP-Ed) program lists a few of the benefits – especially for children whose families eat together five or more times a week as opposed to those whose families eat together two times or less each week:

- ***Nutrition and physical development** – kids eat more fruits and vegetables, get a wider variety of nutritious foods, have lower rates of childhood obesity, and make healthier choices when they are on their own.
- ***Emotional development** – kids are better able to manage negative emotions, are at less risk of developing eating disorders, and have more positive interactions with others.
- ***Social development** – kids learn important turn-taking skills, have improved communication skills, and learn appropriate ways to share thoughts, feelings, and opinions.
- ***Academics** – kids are more likely to earn As and Bs in school, and they develop larger vocabulary – even more than those who read together with their parents.
- ***Behavior** – kids are much less likely to use marijuana, alcohol, or tobacco or have friends who use these substances. They are also less likely to engage in other risky behavior such as premarital sex.

If a family is new to the idea of eating meals together, there will undoubtedly be a few challenges. For example, it may be unrealistic to go from zero meals together to one every day. So, set a realistic goal all family members can agree on – it may very well just be Sunday dinner once a week, and that is a great start. If dinner isn't the best option, perhaps having family breakfast time on Saturday may work better for you.

Here are some additional tips for making family mealtime a positive experience:

- * **Plan meals ahead of time.**
- * **Schedule a set time for meals.**
- * **Involve all family members in the meal prep and clean up.**
- * **Turn off the TV, phones, and all other electronic devices.**
- * **Have pleasant conversations and leave discipline and other negative emotions for another time.**

Additional help is available online from Create Better Health Utah, including conversation starter ideas and making meals fun using themes (e.g., Taco Tuesday). Ideas for menu planning with recipes can also be found there (e.g., citrus chicken salad, oatmeal nut pancakes, and honey-glazed chicken).

<https://extension.usu.edu/createbetterhealth/blog/>

Pumpkin Chili

Serves: 5-6

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 small sweet yellow pepper, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (15 ounces each) black beans, rinsed and drained

½- can (15 ounces) solid-pack pumpkin
1 can (14-1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained
1-1/2 cups chicken broth
1 1/4 cups cubed, cooked turkey
1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
1 teaspoon chili powder
3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
3/4 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon salt

Optional toppings: Shredded cheddar cheese corn chips and sliced green onions

Directions

In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and pepper; cook and stir until tender. Add garlic; cook 1 minute longer. Transfer to a slow cooker; stir in the next 10 ingredients. Cook, covered, on low for 4-5 hours. *Recipe Adapted from Taste of Home*