

# USU Extension's "Create Family Mealtime" Campaign Promotes Making Family Meals a Priority

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September has been branded as National Family Meals Month. In recognition of its importance, Utah State University Extension's Food \$ense (SNAP-Ed) program provides information to help families make mealtime a priority along with tools to help overcome the challenges.

According to LaCee Jimenez, Food \$ense social marketing and eligibility coordinator, research has shown that the benefits of this important time together are more far reaching than most people think.

"Since everyone has to eat, meals are the perfect time for family members to converse and connect," she said. "Food \$ense is launching a new campaign called 'Create Family Mealtime' to help families with busy schedules and tight budgets learn how to have successful mealtimes."

Jimenez said there are currently public transportation busses along the Wasatch Front that are wrapped with Create Family Mealtime advertising that are, or soon will be, in Salt Lake, Cache, Utah, Davis and Weber counties.

"We are excited to get the word out about the benefits of family mealtime and how you can make it work for your family," she said. "Even if you don't have young children at home, you can make time to have a home-cooked meal with other loved ones, including friends."

Jimenez said the benefits of eating together as a family, especially for children whose families eat together five or more times a week as opposed to families that eat together two times or less each week, are numerous and include:

- \* 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 eat with their families. Because of this, they are more likely to continue those habits 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 A's and B's in school. They also develop larger vocabularies – even moreso 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 eating meals together is a new endeavor, it is important to be realistic and set a goal all family members agree on," Jimenez said. "If dinner isn't the best option, perhaps having family breakfast might work better. Be sure to schedule a regular time for whichever meal you choose, so family members know what to plan on, and include everyone in the meal preparation and clean up. Have family members check electronic devices at the door so there are no distractions. Also, keep the conversation positive, and try to involve everyone."

To encourage making family mealtime a habit throughout September, Food \$ense provides Facebook family mealtime pledge cards, quick tips, meal plans and a recipe book. These tools are available through the [Utah Food \\$ense](#) and [Eat Well Utah](#) Facebook pages.

For more information about Create Family Mealtime and Create Better Health, visit [CreateBetterHealth.usu.edu](http://CreateBetterHealth.usu.edu). For information about upcoming classes taught by certified nutrition education assistants in your area, contact your local USU Extension office.

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