

Family Nutrition

March is National Nutrition Month®, which was created by the American Dietetic Association to promote the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle.

Eating healthy can seem difficult at times, especially when juggling a tight budget with busy schedules and different eating preferences. Some days it may seem like there isn't enough time to prepare a nutritious meal, let alone trying to get the kids to eat it. However, eating healthy doesn't have to be one more thing to add to the daily 'to do' list—it can actually be a relaxing way to spend some quality family time together while providing kids with good examples for a healthy lifestyle. Consider the following tips:

Include the whole family in meal planning and preparation. Some families may designate certain days of the week as 'Spaghetti Sunday' or 'Falafel Friday' as a way to plan meals while interjecting some tradition and fun. Another option is to let each family member take a different night and plan and/or prepare dinner—smaller children included (with supervision, of course). If given the opportunity, many kids and adults will enjoy the experience of preparing a meal if their effort is met with appreciation and enthusiasm.

Try something different. Sometimes we find ourselves preparing and/or eating the same thing, day after day. Not only can it affect the nutritional diversity in our diet, but it can also make meal time just plain boring. Consider introducing one new nutritious food or recipe each week—better yet, let the kids pick it out, especially if they tend to be picky eaters.

Family time. Remember that family time doesn't always need to be a planned activity—it can also be the special time spent sharing a meal. Think back on your own childhood memories of meal time. What stands out? What kind of memories would you like for your own kids? Whether it is breakfast, lunch or dinner, research continues to show the benefits of family meal time. It's the perfect time to reconnect and find out what's going on in everyone's lives.

Model healthy behavior. Kids of all ages can learn valuable life lessons at meal time by observing parents or other adults making healthy food choices; engaging in conversation; using manners; being cooperative and responsible (setting the table, cleaning up, etc.); practicing fine motor and coordination skills (using utensils, serving, etc.), etc. Make sure that your behavior is the kind of behavior that you want to see in your kids.

Keep it simple. Preparing a meal doesn't have to be an event every time, nor does it have to be expensive and overly time-consuming. Try to prepare for the week ahead: plan meals based on what food items are on sale, get the grocery shopping out of the way, and lose the stress of last minute meals.

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