

Enriching family mealtimes

Nationwide concerns about the nutrition and health of America's young people have prompted health and education organizations to promote family mealtimes. Research shows that regular family mealtimes have a positive effect on all aspects of a child's development — physical, mental, behavioral, social and educational.

An easy solution

The time has come to focus attention on family meals. Some say attention must be brought to the actual food on the plate, while others are more concerned with the nutrients children need to grow strong, healthy bodies and smart brains. Some are concerned that families don't spend enough time together, that parents aren't teaching their children about well-balanced diets.

Now that schools must meet a federal requirement for local wellness policies, administrators and teachers are looking for innovative ways to encourage positive nutrition and physical activity practices at home.

A toolkit titled *Enriching Family Mealtimes* was developed by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) in response to what school leaders say they need to promote the benefits of family mealtimes. NCBA researchers outlined the benefits of family mealtimes, as well as simple how-to tips for families. School leaders can use the information provided in the toolkit to send home to parents.

Getting started

There are multiple ways to incorporate the contents of the toolkit in a school or program. Each suggested activity is simple, yet some do require a bit more time and planning than others. Included in the toolkit

are tip sheets and easy recipes that will assist in the start of a great family pastime.

Enriching Family Mealtimes handouts can be used to increase awareness of the benefits that come from families eating and talking together. The handouts, tip sheets and recipes are easy to understand. The toolkit is designed so organizations can present the material to families at public or professional meetings. Some possible settings for a presentation include:

- ▶ PTA/PTO and other parent group meetings at school;
- ▶ school wellness team/health council meetings or programs;
- ▶ professional development days for teachers and other school staff;
- ▶ community groups or service organizations (e.g., Rotary or Kiwanis); and
- ▶ women's organizations or church groups interested in families.

What are the benefits of family mealtimes?

Family mealtimes are much more than just eating food together. They provide time for parents to bond with their children and instill in them the knowledge of proper nutrition. Long-standing research shows that enjoying more meals as a family offers numerous health benefits — physical,

mental and emotional — to children.

According to the experts, it's not whether a family eats a meal every night or about the actual food on the plate. Key issues are the communication and intergenerational connections that are made around the table.

There are few, if any, benefits that come from a rushed family meal where the parents lecture, the kids sulk and everyone is angry at the end of the meal. That is why it is important to keep mealtimes positive. According to NCBA research, five or more family meals per week are probably best for children. The toolkit *Enriching Family Mealtimes* wants to help ensure families provide good food and good food for thought.

The Importance of Family Dinners III 2006 survey by the National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University showed just how important family meals can be to success at school. School-age children who reported eating dinner with their family five or more times per week were much likelier to report receiving either all A's or mostly all A's and B's in school. It has also been suggested that mealtime conversations help children improve language skills, such as new vocabulary, sentence structure and how to share their points of view with others.

Seeing results

As always, the best way to get children to understand something is doing it time and time again. A regular mealtime can be hard to stick to in the fast-paced world in which we live. However, the benefits shown in the *Enriching Family Mealtimes* toolkit ensure that the time set aside is well worth it.

Nutrition is a large factor in today's world as the number of overweight children in America ages 6-11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years. The number of overweight adolescents ages 12-19 has more than tripled in the same time period. There is no single cause for the change in children's weights, but there are simple solutions.

Pediatric experts say the best ways to promote healthy weight during childhood, such as regular mealtimes and daily physical activity, need to involve the entire family. Many studies have shown strong links between the eating habits of parents and the food preferences of their children.

Mealtime ideas online

Additional family mealtime resources can be found on various online web sites.

- ▶ National Center on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (Columbia University)
www.casafamilyday.org
- ▶ North Dakota State University Extension Service
www.ag.ndsu.edu/foodwise/familymeals.html
- ▶ Promoting Family Meals Project, Center for Families (Purdue University)
www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff/promotingfamilymeals/index.html
- ▶ Washington State University Cooperative Extension
<http://nutrition.wsu.edu/ebet/toolkit.html>
- ▶ WIN The Rockies™: Wellness in the Rockies
www.uwyo.edu/WINTHEROCKIES_EDUR/FamilyMealtimes.asp

It's simple: When parents eat better, so do their children. Parents who eat a healthy diet, including items such as fruits, vegetables and other nutrient-rich foods, will have children who do the same.

Helpful hints

The toolkit contains guides to help families organize regular mealtimes. Each kit has reproducible handouts, such as mealtime tip sheets, resource lists, conversation starters for all ages, a nutrient-rich shopping list, and recipes. The kit also has a CD with PowerPoint presentations and electronic copies of the handout to be used within larger organizations and meetings.

For more information on the toolkit and how to incorporate an educational and fun family mealtime in your home, visit www.family-mealtimes.org.



Greek-Style Beef Pitas

20 to 25 minutes. Makes 4 servings.

- 1 pound beef round tip steaks, cut 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick
- 1 tablespoon lemon pepper
- 2 to 3 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 3/4 cup plain or seasoned hummus

- 4 whole wheat pita breads, cut crosswise in half

Toppings:
Sliced cucumber, tomatoes, red onion

1. **STACK** beef steaks, cut lengthwise in half, then crosswise into 1-inch wide strips. Combine beef and lemon pepper in medium bowl.
2. **HEAT** 2 teaspoons oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until hot. Add 1/2 of beef; stir fry 1 to 3 minutes or until outside surface of beef is no longer pink. (Do not overcook.) Remove from skillet. Repeat with remaining beef, adding remaining 1 teaspoon oil to skillet, if necessary.
3. **SPREAD** hummus evenly in pita pockets. Fill with equal amounts of beef and toppings, as desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 420 calories; 13g fat (3g saturated fat, 5g monounsaturated fat); 75mg cholesterol; 723mg sodium; 44g carbohydrate; 6.6g fiber; 32g protein; 6.2mg niacin; 0.7mg vitamin B₆; 1.3mg vitamin B₁₂; 4.6mg iron; 55.7mcg selenium; 5.5mg zinc.

This recipe is an excellent source of fiber, protein, niacin, vitamin B₆, vitamin B₁₂, iron, selenium and zinc.



Cook's Notes

Serving Suggestion: For a quick and easy lemony couscous, toss hot cooked whole wheat couscous with fresh lemon juice, freshly grated lemon peel, salt and pepper.



Asian B-B-Q Steak

15 to 20 minutes + marinating time. Makes 4 servings.

- 1 beef top round steak, cut 3/4 inch thick (about 1 pound)
- Salt and pepper
- Sliced green onions (optional)

- Marinade:**
- 1/2 cup ketchup
 - 1/4 cup hoisin sauce
 - 1/4 cup orange juice
 - 2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger

1. **COMBINE** marinade ingredients in small bowl. Remove and refrigerate 1/2 cup for sauce. Place beef steak and remaining marinade in food-safe plastic bag; turn steak to coat. Close bag securely and marinate in refrigerator 6 hours or as long as overnight, turning occasionally.
2. **REMOVE** steak from marinade; discard marinade. Place steak on grid over medium, ash-covered coals. Grill, uncovered, 8 to 9 minutes for medium rare doneness, turning occasionally. (Do not overcook.)
3. **MEANWHILE** pour reserved marinade into small microwave-safe dish; cover with vented plastic wrap. Microwave on HIGH 1 to 1-1/2 minutes or until heated through, stirring every 30 seconds. Carve steak into thin slices; season with salt and pepper, as desired. Serve with sauce and green onions, if desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 211 calories; 5g fat (2g saturated fat, 2g monounsaturated fat); 62mg cholesterol; 480mg sodium; 12g carbohydrate; 0.4g fiber; 28g protein; 5.4mg niacin; 0.4mg vitamin B₆; 1.5mcg vitamin B₁₂; 2.6mg iron; 31.2mcg selenium; 4.4mg zinc.

This recipe is an excellent source of protein, niacin, vitamin B₆, vitamin B₁₂, selenium and zinc, and a good source of iron.



Cook's Notes

Cook's Tips: Hoisin sauce is found in the Asian section of the ethnic aisles in most supermarkets. For gas grilling, preheat grill according to manufacturer's directions for medium heat. Grill steak, covered, 10 to 11 minutes for medium rare doneness, turning once. (Do not overcook.)

Serving Suggestion: Serve with cooked brown rice and a simple Asian-inspired salad of fresh spinach, drained Mandarin orange segments, red onion and your favorite reduced fat or fat-free dressing.

Wild West Beef Hash

40 to 45 minutes. Makes 4 servings.

- 1 pound ground beef (95% lean)
- 3 cups frozen potatoes O'Brien
- Salt and pepper
- 1 jar (15 to 16 ounces) prepared thick-and-chunky salsa
- 1 cup frozen corn

- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 cup shredded reduced fat cheddar cheese or Mexican cheese blend

Toppings:
Reduced fat dairy sour cream, chopped fresh cilantro, lime wedges (optional)

1. **SPRAY** large nonstick skillet with cooking spray; heat over medium heat until hot. Add potatoes; cook 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring occasionally. Remove from skillet. Keep warm.
2. **BROWN** ground beef in same skillet over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is not pink, breaking up into 3/4-inch crumbles. Season beef with salt and pepper, as desired. Stir in salsa, corn and 1/4 cup cilantro; cook 5 minutes or until heated through, stirring occasionally. Stir in potatoes; sprinkle with cheese. Cook 1 to 2 minutes or until heated through and cheese is melted.
3. **SERVE** with toppings, if desired.

Nutrition information per serving: 392 calories; 9g fat (4g saturated fat, 3g monounsaturated fat); 82mg cholesterol; 1109mg sodium; 44g carbohydrate; 3.8g fiber; 35g protein; 8.4mg niacin; 0.7mg vitamin B₆; 2.4mcg vitamin B₁₂; 4.6mg iron; 24.1mcg selenium; 7.2mg zinc.

This recipe is an excellent source of protein, niacin, vitamin B₆, vitamin B₁₂, iron, selenium and zinc, and a good source of fiber.



Cook's Notes

Cook's Tip: Refrigerated diced potatoes may be substituted for frozen potatoes.

Serving Suggestion: Save time with a salad of romaine lettuce, baby carrots, broccoli florets, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers and sliced red onion from the supermarket salad bar.

ENRICHING FAMILY MEALTIMES Weekly Planner

- Ways to use this Planner:
- Choose which days to have a family meal.
 - Name person who chooses menu for dinner.
 - Plan dinner menus for week (or days) ahead.
 - Keep track of special mealtime memories.
 - For a **Family Mealtime Challenge**, write in where and what family ate together.

- Tasty recipe options:
- Greek-Style Beef Pitas
 - Asian B-B-Q Steak
 - Wild West Beef Hash
 - Braised Beef Stromboli
 - Easy Baked Beef, Bean, & Corn Quesadillas
 - Get Up & Go Beef Burritos
 - Thai Beef Wok 'N' Roll-Ups
 - Baked Mighty Mini Meatballs

MONTH						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



Get kids involved in planning fun meals. Even small children can pick a main dish (like pasta or tacos), a vegetable (green salad or cooked carrots), and fruit for dessert (sliced apples or a fruit salad).

Plan to enjoy distraction-free mealtimes. TVs, DVDs, multiple phone calls, and text messaging can distract anyone. The solution is simple: Declare mealtime an electronics-free zone (except for an emergency phone call, of course).



Choose a special table centerpiece. A fun centerpiece sets the tone for the meal. Use a small candle, a few flowers (even dandelions) in a vase, a child's recent art project, or a small basket with conversation starter cards.

Involve every family member in mealtime conversations. Focus on positive topics and establish a few ground rules, such as no teasing, no criticizing, no rude comments about other people, and no talking while someone else is talking.



► Each kit has reproducible handouts, such as mealtime tip sheets, resource lists, conversation starters for all ages, a nutrient-rich shopping list and recipes.