

Center for Youth and Family

Nine Reasons Why Dinnertime Should Be Family Time

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

I'm happy to announce that over the past few years, more and more families are making the intentional effort to have regular, family mealtimes. Here are nine reasons why doing so is a great idea:

- 1. Kids who live in families that eat dinner together regularly are less likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors.** According to a 2009 study done by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven family dinners per week), children who eat dinner with their families infrequently (fewer than three times per week) are twice as likely to use tobacco or marijuana and more than one and a half times likelier to have used alcohol.
- 2. Families who eat dinner together regularly are more likely to have stronger, happier family relationships.** As families struggle to find amounts of quantity and quality time together, family dinnertime provides the opportunity for both. Teens who frequently eat dinner with their family are likelier to say they have excellent relationships with their parents, while teens who have infrequent family dinners are likelier to say they have fair or poor relationships with their parents. When families hang out together and communicate, they grow strong and healthy.
- 3. Kids who live in families that eat dinner regularly together perform better in school.** According to the latest research, compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week are one and a half times likelier to report getting mostly C's or lower grades in school.
- 4. Families who eat dinner regularly develop a stronger family identity.** Eating together serves to build a family identity. Additionally, this family "routine" provides a sense of stability and security that provides kids with a positive environment where they can grow into healthy adults.
- 5. Families who eat dinner together regularly can keep in touch with each others' lives.** Everyone—kids and parents alike—can keep up-to-date during family dinnertime on what is going on with school, jobs, family life, and friends.
- 6. A regular family dinnertime provides natural opportunities for planning and problem-solving.** Scheduling family meeting times to discuss planning, needs, and problem-solving can be difficult. A regular family mealtime can offer a natural solution to the challenge.
- 7. Eating dinner regularly fosters learning.** When families who eat dinner together engage in a variety of conversation topics, learning is encouraged. Kids who are exposed to regular family discussion times learn a broader vocabulary.
- 8. Kids are likely to receive better nutrition when eating dinner regularly with their families.** A simple, but true rule applies: when kids eat with their families, they eat better. A family dinnertime means kids are more likely to eat a nutritionally balanced meal, lower in sugar and fat content, than if they prepare or purchase meals on their own.

9. The benefits of regular family meals don't require a large amount of time. Some might shy away from regular family dinners due to the busy pace of life and the concern for the amount of time a family meal requires. But the latest research shows that the average family meal lasts just 35 minutes. That's not a lot of time to invest in order to see great some great benefits to your family!

Azusa Pacific University's Center for Youth and Family with Jim Burns, Ph.D., serves as a research and training institute dedicated to providing biblically-based resources for parents and youth to help build healthy families.