

## Make Family Dining a Priority

Eating together as a family is a simple and inexpensive way to improve the quality of your family's life, improve your children's chances of success in the world, improve your family's health, strengthen your family values and reduce the likelihood of negative behaviors in your child. Current research reveals that the benefits of frequent family meals include better overall nutrition and fewer diseases, better academic achievement, lower risk of substance abuse, better family communication, children with a more advanced vocabulary and fewer incidents of behavioral problems and depression. Additionally, parents and children who eat together continue to get to know each other and pass on family stories, traditions and cultural identity.

### Benefits of Family Meal Time

- Fosters family togetherness
- Helps prevent behavior problems
- Increases academic success
- Improves eating habits
- Reduces weight issues



### Fun Family Dinners

- Set a 30 minute read time before dinner-silent reading gets kids away from “screen” activities and improve reading levels. Also, having your child read aloud while you prepare dinner has the same benefit and is entertaining for the cook.
- Conversation starters: How was your day? What was the nicest thing you saw today? What was the funniest thing you saw today?
- Holidays and family traditions are special. Add special days by going to [www.earthcalendar.net/index.php](http://www.earthcalendar.net/index.php) , you can find new holidays to celebrate to make an ordinary meal seem special.
- Refrain from lecturing or disciplining children or discussing intense family issues during meal time. Make meal time positive.

Eating together will also increase the chances that you will occasionally prepare meals together and develop a greater interest and appreciation for food and nutrition in general. So please eat with your family tonight and remember to also use the time to relax and enjoy each other's company. Experience the “feel good” of eating together.

#### References:

American Dietetic Association. Position of the American Dietetic Association: Nutrition Guidance for Healthy Children Ages 2-11. *J Am Diet. Assoc.*, 2008, 108: 1038-1047

Cattleman's Beef Board and National Cattleman's Association, *Enriching Family Meal Times*, 2007. For more information go to [www.school-wellness.org](http://www.school-wellness.org)