

FAMILY WELLNESS

# Meal Planning for Families with Older Children

- Setting family meal goals
- Tips for shared meals
- Resources to support



## Having a healthy family begins at the dinner table. But are meals together possible for your family?

In the midst of juggling school work, after school activities, jobs, and household chores, the expectation to serve healthy meals with a side of warm conversation can feel daunting. Families who set achievable goals for meal time-- for example, sitting down together for only 3 or 4 meals a week--may feel like the task is more realistic.

The challenge aside, research has long supported the benefits of families meeting for shared meals.

Studies show that shared meals positively impact a family's nutritional health, mental health, and even their connectedness and relational health. Families who make meals together a priority among the chaos of daily life reap the benefits that this time provides.

The following tips may make it easier to tackle setting this goal for your family and investing time into family meals.



# Make it Possible

How to harness the power of shared meals

## **Include all family members in meal planning and shopping.**

Use an app to collaboratively add items to a weekly grocery list, and discuss together which meals will be available when and who will be responsible for making them. Keep a stock of healthy "help yourself" meals for nights when the family won't sit down together.

## **Give older children ownership over one meal – or part of a meal – a week.**

Can your 10 year old scramble some eggs and cut up some fruit for "breakfast for dinner" night? Can your 7-year-old wash and season the green beans for a side dish? Empower all family members to be a part of the family meal process and contribute on a routine basis.

## **Talk about healthy habits.**

Discuss with the family how healthy meals are balanced with foods from all food groups. Talk about what happens to our bodies when we move and exercise and why it's important. Make healthy choices part of the family pattern, rather than a short-term change, like a diet.

## **Keep food positive.**

Avoid labeling foods as "bad", rather help children learn to balance foods that fuel their bodies with foods that don't. Resist commenting on the amount of food that children eat, and instead help them evaluate whether or not they feel hungry.

## **Make healthy snacks easily accessible.**

By stocking fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy nuts, and whole grains, we can make healthy choices more prominent than processed foods when it's time to reach for a snack. Community programs like Double Up Food Bucks make fresh produce accessible for all families.

**"Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate."**

– ALAN D. WOLFELDT

# Resources

For continued support

- Visit our [5-4-3-2-1 Go!® site](#) for family resources to support children getting 5 fruits and veggies, 4 glasses of water, and 3 servings of dairy daily.
- [Jill Castle](#) is a nutritionist with excellent information and books for families.
- Boys Town has a collection of resources for building relationships during meals: [At the Table](#).
- [Nebraska Extension](#) offers recipes for cooking with kids.
- [Cooking Matters Playbook](#), includes recipes, nutrition information, and tips on ways to safely involve the whole family in the kitchen.

