



## Family Meals

Eating healthy as a family can be difficult. There is a lot of advice and rules for what you should or should not feed your children. Instead of trying to be perfect, focus on eating meals as a family.

Kids who eat together with their families tend to eat healthier, do better in school and are less likely to get in trouble and feel bad about their weight as they get older.

### **A family meal does not have to be...**

- Fancy or special: One loving adult eating with a child counts as a family meal!
- 100% homemade: Canned veggies, frozen fruit, and a sandwich makes a well rounded meal.
- Negative: If you are negative at meal time, your child will learn to do the same.
- Full of Pressure: Family members should not feel pressure to eat foods. Pressuring or even encouraging a child to taste a food can make them not like the food before they have had a chance to try it. Allow your children to try new foods at their own pace.

### **A family meal should...**

- Include 4-5 foods: Aim for a meat or protein, a grain, fruit and/or vegetable, and milk or dairy alternative.
- Have choices: Let family members pick and choose from available food and eat as much as they are hungry for.
- Be positive: Talk about your and your child's day. What did they learn in school?
- Include familiar foods with new foods: Offering new foods with foods your child already likes takes the pressure out of trying the new food. It also ensures your child will have at least one food he or she likes and can fill up on.

### **Keep in mind...**

- Try to have at least 4 family meals a week. These could be at breakfast, lunch, or dinner and take place at a dinner table, park or even in the living room on a blanket. What matters most is your family has the chance to eat and spend time together.
- Set a good example of healthy habits for your family by trying new foods and using good manners yourself.
- Busy schedules can make it difficult to get the family together for meals. However, a child sharing a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or fruit and milk with at least one loving adult counts as a family meal.
- Mealtime is family time. Remove distractions by turning off the TV and putting away cellphones, games and MP3 players.

