

Family Meals spell S-U-C-C-E-S-S

S = Smarter Children:

- **Improved vocabularies and reading skills**
A study by Dr. Catherine Snow at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, followed 65 families over 15 years, looking at how mealtime conversations play a critical role in language acquisition in young children. The conversations that occur around the family table teach children *more* vocabulary and forms of discourse than they learn when you *read* to them. Improved vocabularies lead to better readers. Better readers do better in all school subjects.
- **Improved achievement test scores**
A University of Illinois study of 120 boys and girls age 7 – 11 found that children who did well in school and on achievement tests were those who generally spent large amounts of time eating meals with their families.
- **Greater academic achievement**
A Reader's Digest survey of more than 2,000 high-school seniors compared academic achievement with family characteristics. Eating meals with their family was a stronger predictor of academic success than whether they lived with one or both parents. Share that with families who may not have money or education or a spouse, but do have it in their power to eat with their kids!
- **Higher grades**
Research by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), and others, has found a striking relationship between frequency of family meals and grades. In 2003, the percent of teens who got A's was 20% of those who ate with their families 5 or more times per week compared to only 12% of those who ate with their families 2 or less times per week.

U = Unlikely to smoke, drink, or take drugs:

- In a research project coordinated by Dr. Blake Bowden of Cincinnati Children's Hospital, 527 teenagers were studied to determine what family and lifestyle characteristics were related to good mental health and adjustment. He found that kids who ate dinner with their families at least five times per week were the least likely to take drugs, feel depressed or get into trouble.

According to CASA surveys:

- Teens who eat dinner with their parents twice a week or less are four times more likely to smoke cigarettes, three times more likely to smoke marijuana, and nearly twice as likely to drink as those who eat dinner with their parents six or seven times a week.
- Teens who eat frequent family dinners are also less likely than other teens to have sex at young ages and get into fights; they are at lower risk for thoughts of suicide; and are likelier to do better in school. This is true regardless of a teen's gender, family structure, or family socioeconomic level.
- Teens who have frequent family dinners are more likely to be emotionally content, work hard at school, and have positive peer relationships, not to mention healthier eating habits.

C = Courteous and Conversational:

- Family meals are a natural training ground for learning social skills, manners, and how to have pleasant conversations.
- It's at the family table that we learn to talk, learn to behave, to take turns, be polite, not to interrupt, how to share, and when we have guests, how to entertain – good lessons for success in life!

C = Connected to family:

- According to CASA surveys, teens who have frequent family dinners are more likely to be emotionally content, work hard at school, and have positive peer relationships.
- A study by the Kraft Company found that American families who eat together are happier in many aspects of their lives than those who don't. Children and teens who eat family meals together experience improved family communication, have stronger family ties and a greater sense of identity and belonging.

E = Eating better:

- Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and her colleagues at the University of Minnesota, published the results of the EAT study (which stands for eating among teens) in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association. Their findings showed a dramatic relationship between family meal patterns and dietary intake in adolescents. Their study involved nearly 5,000 middle and high school students of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. They found that family meals were associated with improved intakes of fruits, vegetables, grains, calcium-rich foods, protein, iron, fiber, and vitamins A, C, E, B-6 and folate. Family meals were associated with a lower intake of soft-drinks and snack foods.
- The Project EAT survey also found that girls who ate more frequent family meals exhibited less disordered eating including dieting behaviors, extreme weight control behaviors, binge eating, and chronic dieting.
- Family meals may help prevent childhood overweight for a variety of reasons: Children feel secure that they will be fed; regular meals prevent grazing and promote coming to the table hungry but not "starving." Parents can role model healthy eating behaviors and a healthy relationship with food and eating. Eating can be a focused activity if other activities such as television viewing are not taking place; therefore hunger and satiety cues can be attended to and respected. Family meals promote a sense of belonging and lower the risk for loneliness-induced eating for comfort.

S = Sharing food and conversation at meals

S = Strengthens families!!

Help families and our entire community . . .

Make mealtimes a priority:

- Encourage parents to avoid evening work hours and multiple evening meetings
- One night a week or one night a month have no school activities
- Encourage afternoon practices and activities to end before 5:30
- Encourage evening activities not to begin before 7
- Host events that include sit-down meals for families
- Celebrate Family Day in September, or more often!

Make mealtimes a reality by planning ahead:

- Family and Consumer Sciences classes and after school programs can teach children and teens basic cooking skills and involve the whole family in putting meals on the table.
- Feature web sites, meal planning ideas, and recipes on school menus and employer newsletters.

And, create a positive atmosphere at the table:

- Encourage families to turn off the television and focus on one another instead.

For more information on Family Mealtime visit the Purdue University Center for Families' Promoting Family Meals Project: www.cfs.purdue.edu/CFF/promotingfamilymeals