

Shared Meals Initiative Talking Points

What?

- According to the 2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health, about 22 percent of American children don't share a family meal four or more days of the week.
- Oregon children fair slightly better – about 19 percent of Oregon children don't eat family meals more than four days a week.
- Studies show those with fewer resources are less likely to have family meals.
- Americans spend a large share of their food budget (42 percent) on food away from home.
- More than half the time Americans spend on eating and drinking is spent while doing something else, like watching TV, driving or working.
- Those who engage in certain secondary eating while watching TV have higher-than-average BMIs.
- Between 40 percent and 47 percent of families report eating at least one meal together on most days, usually dinner.
- Actual time spent eating together is brief – on average, 18 to 20 minutes, or around 100 to 120 minutes of family time per week.
- Barriers to family meals:
 - Parent schedules – Many parents work different schedules or work late.
 - Child schedules – Scheduled activities often interfere with dinner time.
 - Preparation time – It's faster to eat out than prepare a meal at home.
 - Shopping time.
 - Knowledge and skills around meal preparation.

So what?

- When people share meals, the result is:
 - Better eating habits.
 - Less obesity.
 - Less substance abuse among adolescents.
 - Less junk food consumption.
 - Less TV watching.
 - Less disordered eating.
 - More family bonding.
 - Psychosocial well-being.
 - Improved learning in children and adolescents.
 - Improved culinary skills among family members.
 - Improved socialization skills.
 - Less risk of mortality.
- A majority of parents feel that family meals are very important.
- Frequency of family meals is positively associated with intake of fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy, and negatively associated with soft drink consumption (Gilman et al 2002).



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- Outcomes associated with family meals include risk reduction, achievement of developmental milestones, and overall health.
- Opportunity to teach table manners, social skills, family values, a sense of community and basic cooking skills (Steiner et al. 1996).
- Teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week) are more likely -- one and half times more likely -- to report having excellent relationships with their parents, according to *The Importance of Family Dinners VIII*, a white paper released in 2012 by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.
- The presence or absence of television during a meal is significantly related to child health and well-being.
- Youth who have regular family meals get better grades, are more motivated at school and get along better with others, while those who eat less frequently were more likely to use drugs or display depression (Tufts 1997, Esienberg et al 2004).
- Eating together reduces risk for being overweight, especially in families with an authoritative or restrictive parenting style (Forthun 2008).
- Obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and stroke.
- Obesity is the No. 2 preventable cause of death among Oregonians (1,400 deaths per year in Oregon), after tobacco use (7,000 deaths), and it is expected to worsen as today's youth carry the burden of obesity into adulthood.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 27 percent of Oregonians are obese (BRFSS 2012).
 - Obesity increased more than 50 percent for both eighth and 11th-graders between 2001 and 2009.
 - Children who are overweight or obese between the ages of 3 and 5 are five times more likely to be overweight or obese as an adult.

Now what?

- Let's share a meal with our friends, neighbors, family member, co-workers... It's good for everyone.
- INITIATIVE SLOGAN: The Shared Meals Initiative's motto is *"Cook together. Eat together. Talk together: Make mealtime a shared time."*
- Shared meals don't have to be the stuff of old family sitcoms like "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" or "Leave It to Beaver."
- When we eat together, we eat better, we socialize, we make connections. Nutrition, health and well-being improve.
- We need to reset the family table.
- 12 tips for starting shared meals:
 1. **Make mealtime a priority.** Plan ahead when you will eat together. Set a goal – maybe two or three times per week – and build from there.
 2. **Be creative and flexible** about when and where you eat together.
 3. **Make mealtime a pleasant and stress-free time.** Talk about fun and happy things. Leave the serious discussions for another time.
 4. **Turn off the TV and cell phones.** Listen to each other. Share the day's stories.



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Nurture the family connection and the good company of others.

5. **Keep meals simple and easy.** Don't make them elaborate. Work salads and vegetables into meals. Focus on familiar favorites, like chili or frittatas.
 6. **Use a slow cooker,** like a Crock Pot. Put everything together before leaving for work in the morning. You'll come home to the delicious smell of a cooked meal.
 7. **Involve everyone in preparation of the meal.** Let kids help prepare meals and set the table.
 8. **Encourage children to try foods,** but don't lecture or force your child to eat.
 9. **Invite others to join you for a meal.** Tell your neighbors, call your friends.
 10. **Avoid portion distortion.** Keep serving sizes under control, whether you're at home or eating out.
 11. **Set the mood.** Play soothing music. Put flowers on the table. Light a candle. Create a relaxing environment.
 12. Still no time to cook? **Pick up some healthy take-out** or order a pizza with nutritious ingredients, and stay at home to eat.
- Healthy foods to have on the table:
 - Milk, water and unsweetened fruit juice.
 - Fruits, vegetables and whole grain.
 - Foods with no or low sodium, fat and calories.
 - The NCO is encouraging Oregonians to celebrate shared and family meals this fall. They can organize shared meal events and regular gatherings, work with community members to help friends and neighbors find ways to regularly share meals and make this activity a routine part of their lives.
 - For more information, visit the NCO website: www.healthoregon.org/sharedmeals

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