

Quality Family Time

by Cindy Stauffer

One of the more common complaints I hear from both children and parents is the lack of quality time each spend together. Children are spending more and more time on the Internet, playing video games, and engaging in other activities that isolate them. Parents are often tired and overwhelmed, finding that spending time with their kids is just one more thing they have to do. They may believe that eating out or grabbing a fast food meal are quick solutions to a busy lifestyle. In reality, eating at home tends to save time and calories and contribute to happier families.

Rounding up family for an evening meal can seem impossible at times. But research is showing that eating as a family has numerous benefits. For instance, conversations during meal time allow family members to bond, learn about each other and remain connected. Dinner table conversation helps children and teens talk about their days and give them opportunities to be heard. Research is also suggesting that frequent family dinners are associated with lower rates of pre-teen and teenage smoking, drinking and drug use. Children's school performance improves when they eat an average of five meals per week with their families. Family dinners foster security, love and a sense of belonging. So, even as older children's lives become more complicated, scheduling meals is a must!

Eating at home also has some very practical benefits. Meals eaten away from home cost two to four times more than meals prepared at home. Meals prepared at home are usually far more nutritious. Unlike food eaten out, home-cooked food tends to be less salty and fatty. Finally, fixing food at home helps to teach children to prepare their own food. Children who help prepare meals learn about cooking and teamwork. Even pre-schoolers can help set and clear the table, stir and measure foods and learn about cooking.

It is time to bring the family back to the dinner table. And doing so will bring you and yours a sense of well-being. Remember, "The Family Who Eats Together Stays Together!"