Family Mealtime

Aim for family meals that:
- Are at consistent and predictable times
- Involve every family member
- Is free of distractions - no TV, calls, cell phones, ipods, etc.
- Include lots of positive conversation and listening
- Offers a variety of healthy food options in the right portions
- Are fun and memorable
- Value the time together as a family

How can families make it happen? Try these helpful hints:
- Talk with family members.
  - What do we like to eat? Serve favorite foods and some new ones, too.
  - What time is best? Make it as convenient as possible.
  - What things are ok to discuss? What are not?
  - What behavior is acceptable and what is not?
- Plan family meals ahead.
  - Start with one meal each week and add more when you can.
  - Keep a list handy of quick family favorite meals.
- Set clear and simple rules.
  - Talk about what is expected from each family member.
  - Table manners are an important learning experience.
- Involve the whole family.
  - Decide how tasks will be shared. Will family members take turns?
- Add variety and be spontaneous.
  - Try different places (parks, restaurants, the backyard, etc.)
  - Be adventurous with new foods.
  - Seasonal themes and table settings make it fun.
- Make it a learning experience
  - Table manners are an important learning experience
  - Teach children how to choose healthy foods and menus.
  - Give specific tasks to family member, according to their ability.
  - Serve foods in new and attractive ways to add appeal and interest.

Written by: Kimberly Fisher, WVU Student, Human Nutrition & Foods
Elaine Bowen, Extension Specialist-Health Promotion
Make It Fun!

- "Kid’s Rule" - Let children do it all, from planning to clean-up. They love to help!
- Restaurant Night
  - Set up the dining room or kitchen like a restaurant. Ask everyone to dress nicely. Dim the lights. Make it as much like a restaurant as possible.
  - OR... create healthier versions of your family’s favorite restaurant foods.
- Geography Night
  - Choose a country and make dinner with foods from that country. Your family will try new foods and have new favorites.
- Invite a friend - Who doesn’t love having someone over for dinner?!
- Spotlight Night
  - Take turns with family members being a “Very Important Person” (VIP). This person gets a special plate/placemat, chooses the menu and VIP treatment for the night.
- Alphabet dinners
  - Choose a letter of the alphabet and foods that begin with that letter. “A” night may include avocados, asparagus, and apricots. Your family will like to trying new foods.
- Family breakfast - Family meals can be anytime.
- Be creative - Get your family to brainstorm!

Make It Healthy

- Offer a variety of foods – whole grains, fruits, veggies, dairy, lean protein.
- Limit foods with fat, cholesterol, sugar, and sodium.
- Serve a healthy appetizer first.
- Start a tradition of an after dinner family activity (walk, game, etc.).
- Use small plates to control portions.
- Serve only healthy beverages with meals (low-fat milk, water, 100% fruit juice.)
- Desserts- serve rarely or offer “Go” foods like fruit.

Save Money!

- Plan menus ahead of time.
- Fix what only what you will use and avoid waste.
- Keep a running list of things used most often.
- Use what you have. Be creative, this may result in a new family favorite!
- Buy in bulk.
- Shop the sales. Buy fruits and vegetables when in season.
- Make “doubles” - When making casseroles, etc. make enough for two meals.

Remember:
The PARENT’S role is to provide the time, place, and healthy foods in proper portions.
The CHILD’S role is to decide whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat.

For more information contact your local WVU Extension Service office or visit www.ext.wvu.edu.
We also recommend the Eat Better Eat Together materials at: http://nutrition.wsu.edu/ebet/toolkit.html