

# Family dinners nourish good mental health in adolescents

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Regular family suppers contribute to good mental health in adolescents, according to a study co-authored by McGill professor Frank Elgar, Institute for Health and Social Policy. Family meal times are a measurable signature of social exchanges in the home that benefit adolescents' well-being – regardless of whether or not they feel they can easily talk to their parents.

"More frequent family dinners related to fewer emotional and behavioural problems, greater emotional well-being, more trusting and helpful behaviours towards others and higher life satisfaction," says Elgar, an associate professor in the Faculty of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry, whose research centers on [social inequalities](#) in health and family influences on child mental health.

The study, conducted by Elgar, Wendy Craig and Stephen Trites of Queen's University, examined the relation between frequency of family dinners and positive and negative aspects of mental health. The researchers used a national sample of 26,069 adolescents aged 11 to 15 years who participated in the 2010 Canadian [Health Behaviour](#) in School-Aged Children study. The researchers found the same positive effects of family meal time on the mental health of the young subjects, regardless of gender, age or family affluence.

"We were surprised to find such consistent effects on every outcome we studied," says Elgar. "From having no dinners together to eating together 7 nights a week, each additional dinner related to significantly better

mental health."

During the study, the adolescents submitted data on the weekly frequency of family dinners, ease of parent-adolescent communication and five dimensions of mental health, including internalizing and externalizing problems, emotional well-being, more helpful behaviors and [life satisfaction](#).

The authors suggest that family mealtimes are opportunities for open family interactions which present teaching opportunities for parents to shape coping and positive [health behaviors](#) such as good nutritional choices, as well as enable adolescents to express concerns and feel valued, all elements that are conducive to good mental health in adolescents.

**More information:** The results of this research are published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Provided by McGill University

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