

Why you should make family meals part of your busy day

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(HealthDay)—Family meals are a recipe for healthy eating in kids,

nutritionists say.

"Research shows that families who regularly dine together are more likely to eat more fruits, vegetables and fiber and are less likely to eat fried foods," said Kristen Gradney, a dietitian nutritionist and spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

"Eating together promotes healthy weight in children, perhaps due to more nourishing food choices, and can encourage them to try new foods," she explained in an academy news release.

Plus, families who eat together tend to be closer, because mealtime encourages conversations. It helps kids feel more at ease sharing their feelings, which, in turn, can help lessen [behavioral problems](#) and may even improve their grades, Gradney said.

As part of Kids Eat Right Month in August, the academy offers this advice to help parents make and enjoy [family meals](#) after a busy day:

- Choose meals without a lot of ingredients. Work with your children to create a collection of go-to recipes that can be ready in less than 30 minutes.
- Stock up on ingredients that can be used for more than one meal. For example, grill twice as many chicken breasts as needed for one dinner and use the extras to make fajitas the next night.
- Try to avoid take-out [food](#). Though convenient, it's not as healthy as a simple, homemade meal that includes [lean protein](#), [whole grains](#), fresh (or frozen or canned) vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, and fruit for dessert.
- Make [family](#) meals a regular part of your routine. Tell everyone to be home to eat at a set time.
- Just for fun, have themed dinners. For example, use a checkered

tablecloth for an Italian-inspired meal, prepare an Asian dish and eat with chopsticks, or enjoy a picnic in a park, your backyard or on the living room floor.

- Use mealtimes to connect. Talk and listen to one another while you eat. Have everyone share something that happened that day or week.

More information: HelpGuide.org has more on [kids and healthy eating](#).

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