



Why are family dinners so important?

Kids might learn to love their veggies

A 2000 survey found that the 9- to 14-year-olds who ate dinner with their families most frequently ate more fruits and vegetables and less soda and fried foods. Their diets also had higher amounts of many key nutrients, like calcium, iron, and fiber. Dinner is also a great time to sneak in a discussion of good nutrition. Kids can even help prep the meal to gain a better understanding of food science.

You control the portions

Eating out can be convenient but it's also caloric—portion sizes in restaurants just keep growing! The average restaurant meal has as much as 60% more calories than a homemade meal. Studies show that when we are presented with more food, we eat more food, possibly leading to our expanding waistlines.

Healthy meals mean healthy kids

Studies have shown that kids who eat with their families frequently are less likely to become depressed, consider suicide, or develop an eating disorder. They are also more likely to delay sex and to report that their parents are proud of them. When a child is feeling down or depressed, family dinner can act as an intervention. This regular family time also means that adults are more likely to spot red flags in the emotional health of their children.

Better food, better report card

Of teens who eat with their family fewer than three times a week, 20% get C's or lower on their report cards, according to the CASA report. Only 9% of teens who eat frequently with their families do this poorly in school. Family meals give children an opportunity to have conversations with adults, as well as to pick up on how adults are using words with each other, which may explain why family dinnertime is also thought to build a child's vocabulary.

continued on next page...



Conversation Starters

Now that you've made time to sit down to dinner, is the silence deafening? Sometimes it's hard to get a good conversation going, especially if everyone's tired or stressed. Try some of these conversation starters!

For kids ages 2-7:

- If you were a teacher and could teach your students anything at all, what would you teach them?
- If you were a season, which season would you be and why?
- Who is your favorite storybook character? What do you imagine he or she feels thankful for?
- If you had superpowers, what would they be and how would you use them to help people?

For kids ages 8-13:

- Choose a situation from a book or a movie that you would like to find yourself in, such as visiting Narnia, playing Quidditch at Hogwarts, etc. Explain why you chose what you did.
- If you could change one thing about your family or about school, what would it be?
- If you could start a new family tradition, what would it be?
- If you could have a character from a book as a best friend, who would it be?

For teens and adults:

- What was the best year of your life so far? Explain.
- Steven Spielberg is quoted as saying, "All of us every single year, we're a different person. I don't think we're the same person all our lives." Do you agree?
- Can someone be "educated" if they haven't gone to school? Explain.
- What is one thing you can do for yourself in the next week that would help you take care of yourself?
- What's one thing that you learned today that you think I might not know?

To make these conversation starters seem less awkward and more like a game, try putting them on separate pieces of paper and sticking them in a jar. Then everyone around the table takes turns picking one and asking the question. For more suggestions, check out thefamilydinnerproject.org.

Supper can be a stress reliever

Believe it or not, if you have a demanding job, finding time to eat with your family may actually leave you feeling less stressed. In 2008, researchers at Brigham Young University conducted a study of IBM workers and found that sitting down to a family meal helped working moms reduce the tension and strain from long hours at the office. (Interestingly, the effect wasn't as pronounced among dads.) Alas, the study didn't take into account the stress of rushing to get out of the office, picking up the kids, and getting a meal on the table.



Put a little cash in your pocket

In 2007, the average household spent \$3,465 on meals at home, and \$2,668 on meals away from home. When you take into consideration that the \$2,668 spent on meals away from home only accounts for about 30% of meals (according to historical data), that's about \$8 per meal outside of the home, and only about \$4.50 per each meal made in your own kitchen. You do the math!

Adapted from [Health](#)

Choosing and using food thermometers

If you're going to be eating as a family, you may find yourselves eating at home more often (and saving some money!). Good kitchen tools can make cooking easier and safer. It might seem finicky, but in recipes calling for specific internal cooking temperatures, a thermometer can make all the difference between a perfectly done dish and one that's undercooked or overcooked. There are really four types of thermometers you can use in the kitchen: all-purpose, oven, meat, and candy. Here's a quick breakdown.

All-Purpose Digital Thermometers: Use it for meat, baked goods, anything that requires an internal temperature reading. (If you use it for meat, just make sure to sanitize the thermometer to avoid cross-contamination.)

Oven Thermometer: An essential tool for many of us to help prevent hot spots and wonky temperatures from affecting our recipes.

Meat Thermometer: A meat thermometer does exactly what you'd think; it's specifically designed to measure the temperature of meat, so it ranges from 140° to 220° Fahrenheit. If you have an instant-read thermometer and a meat cooking temperature guide, you probably don't need a separate meat thermometer, unless you just like seeing the meat labels and temperatures side-by-side.

Candy Thermometer: Digital instant-read temperature ranges aren't usually high enough for tasks like boiling sugar or deep-frying, so that's where a candy thermometer comes in handy. Candy thermometers range from 100° to 400° Fahrenheit, so they're perfect for a range of recipe needs.

Adapted from [The Kitchn](#)

Recipe of the Month:

Cheesy Zucchini and Turkey Casserole

This healthy ground turkey casserole recipe is easy to throw together ahead of time!

Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 lb. ground turkey
 1/2 c. diced onion
 2 cloves garlic minced
 1-1/2 lbs of zucchini diced
 2 c. prepared grains (groats, brown rice, quinoa)
 1 14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes
 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
 1/2 c. finely chopped fresh basil
 7 oz. aged cheddar, shredded

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Heat a large skillet to medium high heat. Add olive oil and ground turkey. Cook until meat begins to brown.

Add onion and garlic. Cook 2 minutes until onions begin to soften and garlic is fragrant. Add zucchini and cook 3-4 more minutes until zucchini begins to soften.

Add your choice of grains, diced tomatoes, oregano, paprika, basil and 1/2 of the shredded cheese. Stir until fully combined.

Pour mixture into a 9x13 baking dish coated in cooking spray. Top with remaining cheese. Cover tightly and freeze for later (defrost before cooking) or bake, uncovered for 20-25 minutes until cheese is bubbly.

Nutrition per serving (6 servings):

Calories: 395; Fat: 21 g; Sodium: 448 mg;
 Carbohydrates: 27 g; Sugar: 4 g; Protein: 27 g

Adapted from [betsylife.com](#)

