

# The Family Table

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## **What is the Family Table?**

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about something called the family table. Even children's television networks are getting in on the trend. Well, what is the family table? It just means eating together; the sharing of food by family and friends on a regular basis. You can choose any meal, be it breakfast, lunch or dinner; it is the time you spend together that is important. Involving everyone in the planning and preparation of the meal can extend that time.

## **It is a place to support one another.**

Eating the same foods is an important way to show support, especially when a family member is on a restricted diet because of a chronic illness. Whenever possible, make one meal for everyone; the home kitchen is not a diner and you are not a short order cook! Children at various life stages can be picky eaters. They should not be allowed dictate what is served. The caretaker should decide what to fix, and the child should decide how much to eat. That ends the "food battles!" The menu should include a protein containing main dish and 2-3 side dishes (starches, vegetables or fruit). Within several weeks of implementing the family table, caretakers generally notice that picky children become more adventurous in food selection.

## **It is a place to learn healthy eating habits.**

You can teach healthy eating, cooking, and etiquette all at once; talk about multi-tasking! You can even teach menu planning and budget control if you wish. It gives caregivers an opportunity to set a good example, and it has been shown that children will revert to eating the way they did growing up once they've moved out of the home. It is not often that you so much influence in the course of another's life.

## **It is a place to stay connected.**

The family table helps you stay involved with your children's lives. If your family meal is breakfast, you can talk about the day's agenda. If you eat together at dinner, they can tell you about what happened at school, practice, or rehearsal. If the tone of the conversation is non-critical, children will share many things with you that you may not hear at other times. The family table is also a great place to share your life journey with another adult. Keep controversial or inflammatory conversations for another setting, and let the conversation be uplifting and relaxed.

## **It is a place to relax!**

In the end, the best thing about the family table is that it is time that has been set-aside for the sole purpose of enjoying your family and friends! Even when your life is hectic and everyone is busy; it is nice to take a deep breath, slow down and sit and eat with the ones you love.

## **Ways to maximize the family table:**

- \* Set mealtimes, the time is negotiable but the meal is not.
- \* Plan menus together, using the food guide pyramid as guideline- See [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) and [www.healthierus.gov](http://www.healthierus.gov) for recommended dietary guidelines.
- \* Whenever possible shop for food together.
- \* Involve everyone in meal preparation and clean up.
- \* Do not discipline at the table, you want meals to be pleasant.
- \* Set standards for behavior and enforce them.

References: Satter, Ellyn; "How To Get Your Kid To Eat..... But Not Too Much", 1987 Publishers Group West, 5855 Beaudry Street, Emeryville, Ca 94608.