

Importance of Family Meals

Lake County Factsheet #FCSN2001

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Positive Home Environment

One aspect of creating a positive home environment that can have an impact on health outcomes is to focus on mealtime. It improves the frequency of consuming balanced meals and making healthy choices from a young age. The meals provide the opportunity for role modeling and communication. This time allows for our bodies to get the nutrition it needs and time to connect as a family, improve mental health, and help identify and solve problems through table discussions.

Quality of Meals

Families that eat three or more meals together a week are more likely to eat healthier foods which include increased fruits and vegetable selections. Daily schedules vary, but mealtime with at least one parent or guardian can have a positive impact. Children that are involved in cooking meals are more likely to try the foods they have created and try new foods.

Improved Health

Making healthier choices goes beyond the plate and includes the beverages that are selected. Decreasing or eliminating sugar-sweetened beverages and replacing with those that provide nutritional benefits and hydration such as water, and low-fat or fat-free dairy helps to aid in improved health. Cooking together as a family allows for healthier cooking techniques, providing healthier meals, leading to a healthier weight, and decreasing the risk of obesity.

Learning Opportunity

When families cook together, they can divide up the tasks and give everyone a part in making the meal. From stirring, measuring, mixing, and reading the recipe. Children can improve fine motor skills and can apply science, math, and reading skills. They can learn more about family traditions and cultural practices by being involved and having the opportunity to ask questions.

Stress-Free Meals

Cooking and having a meal ready in time does not have to be stressful. Plan meals at least a week in advance. Take inventory of what you have at home before heading to the grocery store. Eliminate extra trips or not being able to make a meal by shopping with a grocery list. When meal planning takes into consideration your family's schedule and the type of recipe that would work best in the time you have to prepare it. Make more involved recipes when you have more time. For busy nights plan to have leftovers or pull out previously made meals from your freezer. Turning off the electronics and gathering everyone in the kitchen to help will make cooking more enjoyable and provide your family more time together.