

Benefits of Family Meals

► Overall Health and Nutrition

Reducing away-from-home eating leads to healthier children.

SOURCE: ALTMAN, M; HOLLAND, JC; LUNDEEN, D; KOLKO, RP; STEIN, RI; SAELENS, BE; WELCH, RR; PERRI, MG; SCHECHTMAN, KB; EPSTEIN, LH; WILFLEY, DE. "REDUCTION IN FOOD AWAY FROM HOME IS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPROVED CHILD RELATIVE WEIGHT AND BODY COMPOSITION OUTCOMES AND THIS RELATION IS MEDIATED BY CHANGES IN DIET QUALITY." JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS 115, NO. 9 (SEP 2015): 1400-1407.

Numerous studies have found that eating with others, particularly family, is associated with healthier dietary outcomes for both children and adults.

SOURCE: FULKERSON, JA; LARSON, N; HORNING, M; NEUMARK-SZTAINER, D. "A REVIEW OF ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FAMILY OR SHARED MEAL FREQUENCY AND DIETARY AND WEIGHT STATUS OUTCOMES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN." JOURNAL OF NUTRITION EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOR 46, NO. 1 (JAN 2014): 2-19.

People who eat the most home-cooked meals eat healthier and consume about 130 fewer calories daily, on average, compared to people who cook less or not at all.

SOURCE: WOLFSON, J. AND BLEICH, S. (2014). IS COOKING AT HOME ASSOCIATED WITH BETTER DIET QUALITY OR WEIGHT-LOSS INTENTION? PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION, PUBLISHED ONLINE 17 NOVEMBER 2014.

Educational and public health initiatives aimed at promoting shared family mealtimes may improve nutritional health of children and adolescents.

Clinicians may advise their patients about the benefits of sharing three or more family mealtimes per week. Benefits include a reduction in the odds for overweight (12%), eating unhealthy foods (20%), and disordered eating (35%) and an increase in the odds for eating healthy foods (24%).

SOURCE: HAMMONS, A. AND FIESE, B. (2011). IS FREQUENCY OF SHARED MEALS RELATED TO THE NUTRITIONAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS? PEDIATRICS, 127 (6).

Participation in food purchasing and meal preparation is associated with better health outcomes than participating only in the mealtime activity itself.

SOURCE: CHAN, JC AND SOBAL, J. FAMILY MEALS AND BODY WEIGHT. ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE FAMILY MEMBERS IN FAMILY UNITS. APPETITE, 2011.

Among countries in the developed world, those with food cultures centered on food enjoyment and conviviality, with widely shared, more sacrosanct mealtimes, currently enjoy better health outcomes (improved dietary quality, lower rates of obesity) than those that have reduced food and whose fragmented mealtimes have encouraged individualized eating.

SOURCE: FISCHLER, C. "COMMENSALITY, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE." SOCIAL SCIENCE INFORMATION 50, NO. 3-4 (AUG 31, 2011): 528-548.

On days when restaurants are used in lieu of home-prepared meals, dietary quality declines. Adults and children who eat at home more regularly are less likely to suffer from obesity.

SOURCE: INCORPORATING AWAY-FROM-HOME FOOD INTO A HEALTHY EATING PLAN, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION. DEC 2008.

► Overweight and Obesity

In a study examining the relationship between everyday family rituals and BMI measurements, boys who have a social dinner experience tend to have lower BMI, notably when the family stays at the dinner table until everyone is finished eating. The results are the same for parents.

SOURCE: WANSINK, B. AND VAN KLEEF, E. (2014). DINNER RITUALS THAT CORRELATE WITH CHILD AND ADULT BMI. OBESITY, 22 (5).

There's clear evidence that the structure of a meal can heavily influence a child's long-term health. Kids and teens that share meals with their family three or more times per week are significantly less likely to be overweight, more likely to eat healthy foods and less likely to have eating disorders.

SOURCE: J. BERGE, "THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF FAMILY MEALS FOR YOUTH OBESITY: 10-YEAR LONGITUDINAL ASSOCIATION. 2014

Children and adolescents who share family meals three or more times per week are more likely to be in a normal weight range and have healthier dietary and eating patterns than those who share fewer than three family meals together.

SOURCE: HAMMONS, A. AND FIESE, B. (2011). IS FREQUENCY OF SHARED MEALS RELATED TO THE NUTRITIONAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS? PEDIATRICS, 127 (6).

Compared to family meals eaten at home, family meals eaten away from home are more strongly associated with high BMI.

SOURCE: CHAN, JC AND SOBAL, J. FAMILY MEALS AND BODY WEIGHT. ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE FAMILY MEMBERS IN FAMILY UNITS. APPETITE, 2011.

Frequent family meals eaten away from home are more strongly associated with impacting the BMI of fathers than of other family members.

SOURCE: CHAN, JC AND SOBAL, J. FAMILY MEALS AND BODY WEIGHT. ANALYSIS OF MULTIPLE FAMILY MEMBERS IN FAMILY UNITS. APPETITE, 2011.

Adolescents who participate in even one or two family meals per week are less likely to be overweight or obese in adulthood compared to adolescents who never participate in family meals.

SOURCE: NEUMARK-SZTAINER, D. FAMILY MEALS AND ADOLESCENTS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM PROJECT EAT (EATING AMOUNT TEENS)? PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION, 2010.

► Diabetes

In adolescents with type 1 diabetes, improved dietary change outcomes are seen when the family is targeted as a whole opposed to the child with diabetes only.

SOURCE: JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION. PERCEIVED BENEFITS, BARRIERS, AND STRATEGIES OF FAMILY MEALS AMONG CHILDREN WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES MELLITUS AND THEIR PARENTS: FOCUS-GROUP FINDINGS 2010.

► Mental Health

Children who grow up sharing family meals are more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior as adults, such as sharing, fairness, and respect.

SOURCE: DE BACKER, CHARLOTTE, JS, "OUR" FOOD VERSUS "MY" FOOD. INVESTIGATING THE RELATION BETWEEN CHILDHOOD SHARED FOOD PRACTICES AND ADULT PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN BELGIUM, APPETITE, 2014.

Further research suggests that teens who eat dinner with their parents regularly develop better relationships with them, do better in school, and are at lower risk of using drugs, drinking or smoking.

SOURCE: THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY DINNERS VIII, A CASACOLUMBIA™ WHITE PAPER (NATIONAL CENTER ON ADDICTION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY), SEP 2012.

With each additional family meal shared each week, adolescents are less likely to show symptoms of depression, less likely to use or abuse drugs, and less likely to engage in delinquent acts.

SOURCES: MEIER, A. & MUSICK, K. VARIATION IN ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FAMILY DINNERS AND ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING, JOURNAL OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY, 2014; HAMMONDS, A.J. & FIESE, B.A. IS FREQUENCY OF SHARED MEALS RELATED TO THE NUTRITIONAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS. PEDIATRICS 2011.

Regular family meals in adolescent females may have long-term protective effects in the development of substance use.

SOURCE: JOURNAL OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH, MEALS AND SUBSTANCE USE, 2008.

► Social

Historical and anthropological studies of everyday eating norms have revealed how shared meals have been essential for family bonding and the development of ethical children.

SOURCE: KERNER, S; CHOU, C; AND WARMIND, M., COMMENSALITY: FROM EVERYDAY FOOD TO FEAST. BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC, 2015.

Self-regulation to avoid overeating may rely on the presence of other eaters who both model norms and monitor behaviors.

SOURCE: R. PLINER AND R. BELL, "A TABLE FOR ONE: THE PAIN AND PLEASURE OF EATING ALONE," IN MEALS IN SCIENCE AND PRACTICE, ED. HERBERT L. MEISELMAN. WOODHEAD PUBLISHING SERIES IN FOOD SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND NUTRITION, 2009.

Impact of National Family Meals Month™

(SOURCE: NIELSEN. NATIONAL FAMILY MEALS MONTH: CAMPAIGN RESULTS. 2016)

- National Family Meals Month™ is valuable in conveying the importance of eating meals as a family. More consumers agree that it is extremely or very important to eat meals together as a family when they had familiarity with the campaign (85% vs. 64%).
- The movement is motivating consumers to act. In 2016, 85% of shoppers said they took action after seeing the campaign (up from 75% in 2015). 95% of those who saw the campaign on social media and/or email said that their consumption and/or shopping behavior changed.

- Many healthy actions were taken in households with children. In 2016, households with children represented 59% of those seeing the campaign and report the following changes in their behavior: eating together more often (49%), purchasing more fruits and vegetables (44%), cooking more meals at home (42%), starting to plan meals (40%), and purchasing meal solutions (32%).
- The campaign also had a positive impression on households without children. In 2016, households without children represented 41% of those who saw the campaign. Of these households, 1/3 said they thought the campaign was a good concept. About a ¼ said it inspired more time together as a family and that they plan to purchase more fruits and vegetables after seeing the campaign.

Consumer Research on Family Meals

► Overall Family Meals

Among all adults, only 59% of meals are eaten together, and the growth in alone eating outpaces the growth in single-person households.

SOURCE: FMI FOUNDATION, POWER OF FAMILY MEALS 2017: DESIRES, BARRIERS AND DIRECTIONS FOR SHARED MEALS AT HOME, 2017.

86% of parents who miss some dinners with their child during the week are taking specific steps to eat with their child more.

SOURCE: FMI FOUNDATION, POWER OF FAMILY MEALS 2017: DESIRES, BARRIERS AND DIRECTIONS FOR SHARED MEALS AT HOME, 2017.

Co-shopping is the "new normal" for American households. 84% of all U.S. adults say they have at least 50% of the household responsibility for grocery shopping (compared to 85% in 2016).

SOURCE: U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS 2017, HARTMAN GROUP, 2017.

Lunchtime sees by far the lowest rate of successful "family meals at home": Lunch is prepared and eaten at home with others only 23% of the time. Families with children under 18 years can expect the children to be at school for the lunch half of the day during most of the year. When American adults do eat lunch at home, other family members are quite often absent.

SOURCE: U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS 2017, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE (FMI), 2017.

Each day, 18% of dinners are eaten away from home, and of those eaten at home, 29% are eaten alone.

SOURCE: COMPASS EATING OCCASIONS 2014-2016. THE HARTMAN GROUP. ANALYSIS 2017.

Parents report taking many steps to eat with their children more often including: serving meals that they know their children enjoy (47%); making sure everyone is home at dinnertime (42%); having/sticking to a set dinnertime (34%); serving meals that are already made or require less time to prepare (28%); coming home from work earlier (18%).

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, 2016.

Parents estimate that they enjoy dinner with their children on average 4.7 times per week, about 10% less than they would like.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE (FMI), 2016.

For 68% of consumers surveyed, dinner is the mealtime most of the people in the household eat together. 70% of the survey population said they usually or always eat the same things when they eat together.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. MODERN EATING: CULTURAL ROOTS, DAILY BEHAVIORS 2013.

63% of Americans decide what to eat less than an hour before eating.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. EATING OCCASIONS COMPASS 2013.

People are hungry for help in the kitchen. Shopper studies show that 81% of parents buy items with minimal prep time. Parents recognize and opt for convenience when time is limited. For many, convenience is as important as nutrition.

SOURCE: THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI SHOPPING FOR HEALTH 2013. THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS, 2014.

More men are cooking: The number of male primary grocery shoppers is 43%. Male shoppers are keeping pace with their female counterparts in number of visits to stores and in visits across channels. Sharing shopping roles means that more shoppers are making more trips to more stores.

SOURCE: THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI SHOPPING FOR HEALTH 2013. THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS, 2014.

In contrast to the relatively structured and uniform eating culture that the modern grocery store was first established to serve, today's eating is more dynamic, democratized, and influenced by multiple family members having a voice in what is eaten and prepared (31% of Millennials report sharing at least half of the responsibility for dinner preparation).

SOURCE: THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS, 2014.

31% of Millennials report sharing at least half of the responsibility for dinner preparation.

SOURCE: THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS 2014.

Cooking is no longer a gender-based tradition. The percentage of men who spent time cooking on any given day has jumped to 42%, as compared to 29% in 1965.

SOURCE: SMITH, L. TRENDS IN US HOME FOOD PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION: ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEYS AND TIME USE STUDIES FROM 1965-1966 TO 2007-2008. NUTRITION JOURNAL, 2013.

► **Benefits of Home-prepared Meals**

88% of U.S. adults say they eat healthier at home than when they are out.

SOURCE: FMI FOUNDATION, POWER OF FAMILY MEALS 2017: DESIRES, BARRIERS AND DIRECTIONS FOR SHARED MEALS AT HOME (2017).

Most adults enjoy food preparation.

SOURCE: THE POWER OF FRESH/PREPARED DELI, FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE (FMI). 2016 AND FOODWAYS OF YOUNGER GENERATIONS: MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z. THE HARTMAN GROUP. 2016.

Preparing one's own food is believed to save money compared to eating out.

SOURCE: MODERN EATING: CULTURAL ROOTS, DAILY BEHAVIORS. THE HARTMAN GROUP, 2013.

81% percent of U.S. households cite home as the most popular location for eating dinner, and nearly half (50%) of consumers report eating dinner with everyone in their household every night of the week. Overall satisfaction was higher among those who made dinner at home compared to those who eat out or have take-out food at home.

SOURCE: THE NPD GROUP. DINNER TIME MEALSCAPE STUDY, 2009.

► **Benefits of Eating Together**

When parents eat dinner alone, they find their own evening meal less satisfying.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. COMPASS EATING OCCASIONS 2014-2016, 2017.

Parents believe it is important to eat with their children and tend to want to eat with their children more. This is especially true for middle-aged fathers.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, 2016.

86% of parents who miss some dinners with their child each week are taking specific steps to eat with their child more.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, 2016.

When adults find themselves eating alone, they often report choosing restaurants or takeout because of the inefficiency of cooking for one. Conversely, preparing food to share among many eaters allows for economy of scale.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. MODERN EATING: CULTURAL ROOTS, DAILY BEHAVIORS, 2013.

► Barriers to Eating Together

Eating dinners together at home is both a priority and an ongoing challenge for large numbers of Americans: 71% of parents say that ideally they would like to eat dinner with their children every night.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, 2016.

Adults believe that eating family meals is important, but family meals fail to occur as often as they succeed (50% of the time) in families with children under 18 years.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE, U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS, 2017.

Regarding schedules, adults are usually the problem with “dual incomes creating dueling schedules”. More than either parent would like, one of them usually misses family dinner. Fathers typically aspire to eat as many family dinners as mothers already do.

SOURCE: FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. SHOPPING FOR HEALTH, 2016.

Quick Stats

- 81% of parents buy items with minimal prep time.

SOURCE: THE FOOD MARKETING INSTITUTE. FMI U.S. GROCERY SHOPPER TRENDS 2014.

- 63% of Americans decide what to eat less than an hour before eating.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. EATING OCCASIONS COMPASS 2013.

- 57% of people decide what’s for dinner an hour before mealtime. 26% decided earlier that same day.

SOURCE: THE NPD GROUP. NATIONAL EATING TRENDS® 2012.

Today 42% of men are cooking as compared to 29% in 1965.

SOURCE: SMITH, L. (2013). TRENDS IN US HOME FOOD PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION: ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEYS AND TIME USE STUDIES FROM 1965-1966 TO 2007-2008. NUTRITION JOURNAL, 12 (45).

- According to a 2013 Harris poll, only 30 percent of American families share dinner every night.

SOURCE: WOLFSON, J. AND BLEICH, S. (2014). IS COOKING AT HOME ASSOCIATED WITH BETTER DIET QUALITY OR WEIGHT-LOSS INTENTION? PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION, PUBLISHED ONLINE 17 NOVEMBER 2014.

- 68% of consumers say dinner is the mealtime most of the people in the household eat together.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. MODERN EATING: CULTURAL ROOTS, DAILY BEHAVIORS 2013.

- 70% of consumers say they usually or always eat the same things when they eat together.

SOURCE: THE HARTMAN GROUP. MODERN EATING: CULTURAL ROOTS, DAILY BEHAVIORS 2013.

- Sharing even one or two family meals per week as an adolescent is associated with lower rates of obesity in adulthood.

SOURCE: NEUMARK-SZTAINER, D. FAMILY MEALS AND ADOLESCENTS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM PROJECT EAT (EATING AMOUNT TEENS)? PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION, 13 (7), 2010.

For more information, see *The Power of Family Meals 2017: Desires, Barriers, and Directions for Shared Meals at Home*, 2017.