

Family dietary pattern: nurturing health and harmony through family meals

Family meals are an essential keystone in shaping a healthy family environment. Besides the nutritional benefits, family meals have also been associated with improving children’s mental health, especially teens

Mental and well-being benefits

- A family meal contributes to unity, a positive atmosphere, and overall well-being. It is an opportunity for family discussion despite the busy day routine
- A family meal improves communication, family functioning, and a strengthened sense of belonging
- Studies have shown a correlation between frequent family meals, improved school performance, and reduced risk of risky behaviors in teenagers
- Collaborative meal preparation fosters teamwork on the one hand, and the division of responsibility between the family members encourages independence on the other hand
- The preparation itself (i.e., Cutting, kneading, measuring quantities) improves the fine motor skills of younger children

Martins CA. et al., *Appetite*, 2020

Utter J. et al., *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 2013

Nutritional benefits

- A family meal is an opportunity for the parents to model healthy eating habits and promote health. Of course, the fact that you eat together does not necessarily indicate the quality of the food, and you, the parents, should ensure that the food is healthy and varied
- A family meal is an opportunity for the parents to provide all the essential macro-nutrients: proteins, unsaturated fats, whole grains, and vegetables (see the “healthy plate”)
- A family meal creates a daily routine and eating schedule



Hammons AJ. Et al., *Paediatrics*, 2011

Dallacker M., et al. *Obesity reviews*, 2018

Practical tips to implement a family meal

- Plan one family meal this week; it doesn’t have to be dinner
- Share responsibilities between all family members to make things easier for you, the parents
- Plan meals in advance, involving your children when possible
- When asking your children about food choices, present two healthy options for them to choose from
- Enhance family meals with a conversation game, such as sharing a joyous moment or congratulating each other

Please note that these are general recommendations and should not be considered a substitute for personalized advice from a professional