

January is Sunday Supper Month

FORWARD DUPAGE is pleased to join others in celebrating January as Sunday Supper Month. This relatively new celebration is a time to honor meals at the family table. For many families the hectic pace of day to day activities slows a bit on Sunday (especially during the post-holiday and early winter months) allowing families to more easily plan, prepare and enjoy a meal together. While the goal may be Sunday suppers together, the research shows that families who dine together regularly reap a number of benefits. The American College of Pediatrics has researched the benefits of the family table. Check out their website for the full document and full list.

“Family meals are powerful for many reasons. First, meal times impact all of our senses – the sight, touch, taste, and smell of food, as well as listening to family conversation. Family meals offer the opportunity to spend time together, reconnect after a busy day, communicate with and listen to each other, share values and ideas, and problem solve.

Family meals also contribute to traditions that tie families together. A special food for a birthday celebration, a favorite place to eat for special occasions, a cultural or ethnic food unique to the family’s heritage – these become traditions that provide meaning and context to children as they grow.

Family meals provide structure for the day, allowing children to feel more secure and safe, knowing what to expect. They also permit parental monitoring of children’s moods, behavior, and activities, providing parents with insight into the emotional well-being of their children. When extended to neighbors and friends, family meals allow children to learn and appreciate social interactions, understand the importance of community, and experience different ideas while under the guidance of their parents.

The family table is one of the very few places that children can observe their parents interact, negotiate, solve problems, express emotions and treat one another with respect. A child’s world is mostly spent with peers and teachers; the family table gives them a chance to see how adults interact and cooperate.”ⁱ

Although there are many benefits, included here is a succinct list. According to the research, The Family Table:

- improves dietary quality and promotes healthy weight
- lowers children’s risk-taking behaviors (like smoking or taking drugs, feeling depressed or getting into trouble)
- improves family relationships and emotional health: children are more emotionally content and are better able to develop positive peer relationships

- improves children’s academic performance: specifically vocabulary, reading skills, higher grades, improved achievement test scores
- improves family communication and strengthens family ties

Those who write for WebMD share these simple tips to get the family together around the dinner table.

- *Set a goal. Twice a week, perhaps? Build from there.*
- *Keep it simple. Family meals don't have to be elaborate. Work salads and vegetables into meals. Focus on familiar favorites, like chili or frittatas.*
- *Be prepared. Keep ingredients for healthful meals on hand, including plenty of fruits and vegetables.*
- *Keep healthy 'appetizers' on hand. Stock the kitchen with fresh fruits, nuts, and low-fat cheese -- stuff the kids can snack on after school, instead of chips.*
- *Get the family involved. Let kids help prepare meals and set the table.*
- *Use the crock pot. Put everything together before leaving for work in the morning. You'll come home to the delicious smell of a cooked meal.*
- *Pick up take-out, order pizza, or eat out. It still counts as quality time spent together.*
- *Avoid portion distortion. Keep serving sizes under control, whether you're at home or eating out.*
- *Make it enjoyable. Leave the serious discussions for another time. Family meals are for nourishment, comfort, and support.*
- *Set the mood. Play soothing music. Put flowers on the table. Light a candle. Create a relaxing environment.ⁱⁱ*

For more detailed information, check out these websites:

<https://sundaysuppermovement.com/january-is-national-sunday-supper-month/>

<http://www.acped.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/12.2.14-The-Benefits-of-the-Family-Table.pdf>

<https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/features/family-dinners-are-important>

<https://sundaysuppermovement.com/sunday-supper-recipes/>

ⁱ <https://www.acped.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/parenting-issues/the-benefits-of-the-family-table>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/features/family-dinners-are-important>