
Module - Family Meals

Time:

15-30 minutes

WIC Status:

Any Status

**Learning Objective:**

Participants will:

- Understand the importance of family meals
- Increase the number of meals eaten together as a family

Handouts and Materials:

- USDA 10 tips Nutrition Education Series
 - “Be a Healthy Role Model for Children” DG Tip Sheet No. 12, June 2011

Facilitating WIC Discussion Group Concepts:

- Providing participants with a more meaningful nutrition education experience that involves interactive learning.
- As the certifying health professional, you will be the facilitator and moderate a group conversation-style discussion.
- Encourage all participants to participate but recognize that some participants may prefer not to speak in a group setting. If the participant cannot answer, chooses not to answer, or has a negative response, you may respond with a statement such as “Trying something new is not always easy.”
- It is important to establish “ground rules” for the group. For example:
 - Set the time, agenda, and the length of session
 - Establish rules on confidentiality and sharing of group responsibilities.
 - Clarify procedural issues, especially listening to, respecting ideas or comments and allowing time and opportunity for others in the group to share.

Outline – Family Meals

Icebreaker:

Have each participant introduce themselves and state the name and age of their children.
(Optional)

Facilitated Discussion Topic Opening Questions:

Ask one of the following questions to facilitate discussion:

- *What do you think of when you hear “family meals”?*
- *How often does your family eat a meal together?*

Discussion Topics:

Family Meals are Important

Family meals allow us to practice good parenting skills and help our children develop healthy habits.

- Family meals are a great time to be a role model for both good manners and healthy eating habits. Children often mimic their parents, so setting a good example is important. Use this opportunity to teach children to say “Please” and “Thank-You”. Let your child see you enjoying the healthy foods that you want them to enjoy. Infants even benefit from family meals.
- Family meals help to create meaningful connections with your child. Not only are children learning when a family eats together, they are also bonding.
- Eating habits and preferences are developed when children are young. Children will develop preferences for the foods you serve them. Offering healthy food choices during family meals helps children to:
 - Learn to enjoy fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low fat dairy (whole milk is recommended for children under 2 years)
 - Limit their intake of sugar sweetened beverages
- Family meals may be made faster and cheaper than eating out. Meals bought away from home may cost two to four times more than meals fixed at home.
- Studies show that children raised in homes where families share a meal together on a regular basis are:
 - More likely to make better grades in school
 - Less likely to have an eating disorder
 - Less likely to use drugs or alcohol
 - Less likely to be obese

Common Barriers to Family Meal Time:

For many people the idea of family meals can be overwhelming, especially if you grew up not having family meals. These are some common reasons for not eating together as a family:

- Families feel they do not have time to shop and prepare meals.
- Time conflicts between work schedules, school schedules and other extracurricular activities can make it difficult to have a common meal time.
- The person responsible for making the meals may feel frustrated. This frustration can vary from buying the groceries, cooking the food or with clean up.
- Infants in the house that require to be fed earlier than the family normally eat.
- The person cooking feels they have to prepare more than one meal because someone in the family may not like the food.
- People want to watch TV while they eat.
- Lack of confidence in preparing a meal.
- Arguments or discipline can cause mealtime to be unpleasant.

Tips for Making Family Meals Easy and Enjoyable:

- Aim for one or two family meals a week at first. Increase the number of family meals per week as your schedule allows.
- Try breakfast together on a weekend. This counts as a family meal too!
- Have a plan. This helps to reduce stress closer to meal time.
- Keep it simple. Remember, meals do not have to be elaborate. For example, try soup and a sandwich.
- Children can help set or clear the table.
- Have a schedule for meals and snacks. Children need a meal or a snack about every 2-3 hours.
- It is important to limit snacks too close to meal time so your child comes to the table ready to eat.
- Try to plan for quiet time before meals. An overly stimulated child may be less interested in eating at mealtime.
- Include your infant: sit him or her in a highchair at table during mealtimes.
- Children learn well from routine; encourage your child to eat at the table.
- If the child doesn't like the meal being served, serve only a small portion of the "unliked" food along with a familiar food. There is no need to prepare a separate meal. Remember that it may take 8-10 tries before your child will eat a new food.
- Instead of focusing on a clean plate, listen to your body and stop when you feel full. Not struggling with cleaning your plate provides a more pleasant mealtime.
- Keep meal time pleasant. Try not to use this time to discipline.
- During family meals, try to keep discussions to positive or neutral topics.
- Family meal time should be something that your child looks forward to.
- Turn the television and cell phones off! Distractions interfere with family bonding.

Summary:

Family meals are an important way to help your child grow physically, socially and emotionally. If your family is not used to eating family meals, start small, scheduling just 1-2 meals per week. The WIC Program encourages you to have family meals together.

Closing Activity/Questions:

Ask one of the following questions to conclude today's discussion.

- *What did you find most interesting about today's topic?*
- *Was there something you heard today that you haven't heard before?*
- *Do you plan to make any changes with your family's mealtime?*

References:

- Mastering family meals step-by-step, Ellyn Satter Association, 2011
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- Pediatric Nutrition Handbook 6th Edition, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009
- Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook, Ellyn Satter, 2008, Kelcy Press
- Eating Together for Health and Fitness, NCPH, 2004
http://www.wellnessproposals.com/pdfs/nutrition_handouts_1/eating_together.pdf
- No More Food Fights, NCPH, 2003
http://www.wellnessproposals.com/pdfs/nutrition_handouts_1/tools_foodfights.pdf
- Family Mealtimes: More than Just Eating Together, Katherine L. Carson PhD RD, 2006
Journal of the American Dietetic Association, volume 106, number 4, page 532
- <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201306/the-family-dinner>
- http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_7.pdf
- <http://www.superhealthykids.com/healthy-kids-recipes/10-benefits-to-eating-family-dinner.php>
- <http://casafamilyday.org/familyday/files/media/The%20Importance%20of%20Family%20Dinners%20VI%202010%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

Resources:

- The USDA 10 tips Nutrition Education Series, "Be a Healthy Role Model for Children" DG Tip Sheet No. 12, June 2011 may be found at: <http://origin-www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/ten-tips.html> or direct link <http://origin-www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet12BeAHealthyRoleModel.pdf>
- <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthy lifestyle/PlayHard/makefamilytimeanactivetime.htm>