FAMILY DINNERS FOR HEALTHY EATING

Food

Build healthy eating habits with customizable recipes from our Build-Your-Own section!

Fun

Get everyone interested in where their food comes from with a round of "How Many Hands?"

Conversation

Celebrating Dad this month? Check out our Father's Day printables!

Interview

- Talk about a time you tried something new. What was it? What happened?
- What was your favorite tradition when you were a child? Have you passed that down to future generations? Will you?
- Tell me your favorite story about our family. Why do you like this story in particular?
- Do you know any stories about your grandparents when they were kids?
- Tell me something about yourself that you think I might not know.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/family-dinners-healthy-eating

One of the many benefits of family dinners is healthy eating habits -- more fruits and vegetables, fewer fried foods and trans fats, lower consumption of sodas and sweets. Research shows that these benefits last into adulthood, so kids who regularly gather with their families around the dinner table are truly getting the building blocks they need to have healthy eating habits for a lifetime.

But what does "healthy" even mean, and how can you be sure you're taking advantage of your family dinners as an opportunity to model the eating habits you want the whole family to develop?

The definition of "healthy" is highly individual, just like our family dinners. What works for one family may not be ideal for another. With food sensitivities and special dietary needs on the rise, deciding what's healthiest for your family is best left between you and a medical professional. However, building enthusiasm and good habits to help everyone enjoy healthy eating is just as important as what you serve.

Here are our top tips for building a positive relationship with healthy eating at the dinner table:

PREP FOR SUCCESS.

Getting everyone involved in planning, shopping and preparing the foods you serve is a great way to introduce new tastes and make choosing and trying healthy items fun for the whole family! Try some of these suggestions to set yourself up for healthy eating success, and to boost family members' interest in what goes on their plates.

Shop the Perimeter with Chef April:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/perimeter

Pack the Pantry with Smart Choices:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/pack-pantry

Get Kids Involved in Cooking:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/involved

Try a Grocery Scavenger Hunt: *thefamilydinnerproject.org/scavenger*

Explore Mystery Foods:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/explore

Plan Meals with a "Shared Calendar":
thefamilydinnerproject.org/plan-calendar

TAME PICKINESS WITH POSITIVITY.

"Okay," you might be saying, "but what about my picky eaters? They won't touch anything healthy!" Selective eating is one of the most common challenges families face at dinnertime, but it doesn't have to define your meals. Tastes change over time. With patience and encouragement, you can find the right balance between honoring taste buds and building healthy habits.

Chef Robin's Strategies for Moving Beyond Picky Eating:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/picky

Taking a LEAP: Helping Selective Eaters Try New Foods:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/leap

A School Chef Offers Advice for Picky Eaters:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/school-chef

BUILD IN PLAYTIME.

We've all said it at some point: "Stop playing with your food!" But playing with food can actually be a powerful way to broaden kids' horizons and make them more adventurous eaters in the long run. Here are some fun ideas to bring playtime to the table.

Blindfolded Smell Test:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/blind-test

Guess the Ingredient:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/guess

Food Collage:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/collage

Ingredient Race:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/race

Play with Color and Taste
thefamilydinnerproject.org/color-taste

Above all, remember that the family dinner table isn't just about the food -- it's about the fun and conversation, too! Make sure to focus on each other and not on what family members are (or are not) eating. When you relax, others at the table will relax and open up, too, making for a welcoming atmosphere that's healthy for bodies, minds and spirits.

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE DINEEN FAMILY

Susan and Rich Dineen, proud grandparents, caught our attention as the creators of a set of free downloadable conversation starters specifically designed for grandparents and grandchildren to use around the dinner table. Their "Just Ask" questions could be used as a fun extension to the hundreds of conversation starters posted here on The Family Dinner Project. We caught up with the Dineens during a family vacation and asked them to share some more insights from their dinner table!

THE FAMILY:

Susan and Rich Dineen and grandchildren Paige (13), Ben (12), Curtis (10), McKenzie (7) and Joshua (5), of Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE GOAL:

Because they're in a grandparent role rather than a daily parenting role with the children in their lives, Susan and Rich find it can be tricky to allow equal space at the dinner table for each child to contribute to the conversation. Eating together only on occasion means that it's even more important for everyone to have a chance to connect meaningfully at the table, but not all members of the family might have the same comfort level with sharing during dinner conversation. Susan's goal is to help all the grandchildren learn to take turns and share something when they're all together.

THE CHALLENGE:

The big challenge Susan and Rich encounter during their visits with the grandchildren is making dinner a time for meaningful conversation, not just a time to eat and run.

THE STRATEGIES:

To help give everyone a chance to share meaningfully at dinnertime, the Dineens ask each of the children to share one special moment from their day, as well as a more difficult or challenging moment. (This popular strategy for getting kids to open up is similar to Rose and Thorn.) They expand upon the conversation by asking each child what they might do differently next time if faced with the same difficult situation, then allowing everyone else at the table to provide additional suggestions and encouragement.

The Dineens also use their special "Just Ask" conversation starters to help keep things flowing. Susan shares that she's found her grandchildren love to ask questions, and she and Rich love to engage with them and share their experiences, so the questions help keep things fresh and entertaining.

Susan and Rich add that while their family dinners with their grandchildren are less frequent and therefore a bit different than the daily meals they shared when their own children were younger, they fondly recall one family ritual from those days that made the dinner table a special place to be. On Mondays, the Dineen family always had a candlelight dinner where the candle was passed from person to person as each family member named something they were thankful for. They would then spend the rest of the meal having a family meeting, where they discussed the week ahead and laid out expectations for every family member during the coming days.

THE FOOD:

Dineen family favorites are pizza, spaghetti and meatballs.

Try our recipes for their top picks:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/simple-tomato-sauce/
thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/basic-meatballs/
thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/homemade-pizza-2

THE TAKEAWAY:

The Dineens say that the biggest message they can share with others about family dinners is a simple one: "Eating together is a great way to bond."

THE BEST PART:

For Susan and Rich, their old candlelight ritual is reinvented with the grandchildren by opening each meal together with a prayer. During that time, everyone shares how they've been blessed that day — a highlight for Susan that's made possible by taking the time to slow down and gather at the table together.

"BUILD YOUR OWN" RECIPES

Visit our website to see "Build Your Own" Recipes.
thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/build-your-own

HOW MANY HANDS?

Choose a food on your plate and count how many steps were involved in getting it to your table. For example, "rewinding" your glass of milk's journey might look like this: table, kitchen, grocery store, truck, distribution site, really big truck, farm, cow. If someone gets stuck, go around and see if anyone can think of more steps. How far back can you go?
thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/how-many-hands

CONVERSATION

Celebrating Dad this month? Check out our Father's Day printables!

Instructions:

The Family Dinner Project Printable Placemats:
1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along red cutlines. 3. Write your names. 4. Set them on the table & have fun!

The Family Dinner Project Printable Father's Day Card:
1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along orange lines. 3. Fold along gray lines 3. Fill out your answers. 4. Give it to your dad.

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FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

Your Name: _____

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. Tell me something you learned today that you think I might not know.
2. If you were a utensil, which you be. Why?
3. Do you think it's possible to change the world? Why or why not?

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Cut Line

FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

Your Name: _____

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. What is the best gift you've ever received?
2. When you are upset, what helps calm you down?
3. What is the hardest thing about being your age? What is the best thing about it?

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Cut Line

FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. What does it mean to be brave? When have you been brave?
2. What is one thing you did today to help other people?
3. If you could live during another time in history, when would want to live? Why?

Your Name: _____

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Cut Line

FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. What 3 words would you use to describe your family?
2. What makes you laugh really hard?
3. You have a sailboat big enough to sail around the world. Where would you go?

Your Name: _____

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Cut Line

Cut Line

BACK

To

From

THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT.ORG

Fold Line

FRONT

D A D

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Fold Line

One word I would use to describe Dad is:

If I spent a whole day with my dad, we would:

One thing my father has taught me is:

What 3 words would you use to describe our family?