

Food for Thought

September 2023

National Family Meals Month

September is National Family Meals Month. Pledge to eat one more family meal each week than you normally do. There are many benefits for children and families who eat together regularly including:



- **Family Meals = Better Nutrition:** Research shows that families who eat 3 or more meals per week together increase healthy food consumption by 24%. This includes more fruits and vegetables and an overall wider variety of nutritious foods.
- **Family Meals Promote Emotional Balance:** Having more family meals increases self-esteem and sense of well-being as well as promotes stronger family relationships. Kids are happier, more fulfilled, and have better body images when they regularly enjoy family meals.
- **Family Meals Promote Positive Social Skills:** Kids learn important turn-taking and communication skills, and appropriate ways to share thoughts, feelings and opinions.
- **Family Meals Make the Grade:** Kids from elementary through high school who eat meals with their families four or more times a week earn better test scores and grades, develop larger vocabularies, and have more success in school.
- **Family Meals Decrease Risky Behaviors:** The more often family meals are shared, the less likely kids are to drink alcohol, smoke, or use other drugs. Family meals can also help safeguard kids against the harmful effects of cyberbullying.
- **Family Meals = Healthier Futures:** With more family meals, kids have lower rates of childhood obesity. They are also more open to trying new foods and are more likely to continue healthy habits when they are on their own.

Tips for Successful Family Meals

- **Schedule Your Family Meals:** Set aside time on the calendar just like you schedule other important activities, appointments, and events.
- **Plan Ahead:** Plan quick, easy, and nutritious meals ahead. Make recipes that you can freeze and reheat or prepare ingredients ahead of time so you can quickly put meals together.
- **Keep meals simple:** Choose a protein, whole grain, vegetable and/or fruit and you will have a balanced healthy meal to serve to your family. It doesn't have to be fancy.
- **Plan family meals besides dinner:** If evenings are too hectic, try a family breakfast. If there are sports practices or other evening activities try a picnic in the park before or after.



- **Parents don't have to do everything:** Involve the kids in meal planning, shopping, preparing and clean-up. When kids are involved, they are more likely to consume the foods you offer, and they learn important life-long skills.
- **Eliminate distractions:** Turn off electronic devices such as phones and tv's. Use this time to connect and share what is going on in each other's lives.

Cucumber Salad with Tomatoes

- 2 cups diced cucumbers
- 1 cup seeded and diced tomato
- 1/4 cup chopped sweet onion
- 2 cups cooked couscous or rice
- 2 teaspoons dill weed
- 1/2 cup low-fat Italian salad dressing



1. Wash hands for 20 seconds before preparing food with warm water and soap.
2. Toss together the cucumber, tomatoes, onions, couscous or rice, dill weed and salad dressing.
3. For best flavor, chill for 1 hour before serving.
4. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Mexican Rice Bowl

- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 3/4 cup rinsed and drained canned no salt added kidney or black beans
- 1/2 cup salsa
- 1/4 cup (1 oz.) shredded cheddar cheese, Monterey Jack cheese or crumbled cojita cheese
- 1 medium avocado, pitted, peeled and sliced



1. Wash hands for 20 seconds before preparing food with warm water and soap.
2. Cook rice according to package directions.
3. In small saucepan, combine beans and salsa. Cook and stir over medium heat until hot. (Or, combine beans and salsa in microwave-safe bowl. Loosely cover and microwave on high about 1 minute or until hot.)
4. Spoon rice into 3 serving bowls. Spoon bean mixture, cheese and avocado on top.

Sources: https://extension.usu.edu/news_sections/home_family_and_food/create-family-mealtime; <https://www.fmi.org/family-meals-movement>; <https://www.shopfamilyfare.com/family-meals-month>; <https://www.eatgathergo.org/recipes/> retrieved 08/30/23

Eat Smart Idaho can help you learn how to eat well for less. For Information on Eat Smart Idaho classes, contact the Nutrition Instructor in your county:

Panhandle: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai & Shoshone Counties
208-292-2525

North Central Idaho: Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, & Nez Perce Counties
208-883-2267



To contact the Eat Smart Idaho Coordinator: Kali Gardiner, RDN, LDN
Phone: 208-292-2525 E-mail – kalig@uidaho.edu Web: www.eatsmartidaho.org

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