

[IMAGE]

## The Hidden Benefits of Family Meals

By Editorial Staff

Sitting down to the table for a family meal isn't what it used to be, and evidence suggests the consequences are frightening, and not just from a nutritional perspective. In fact, children are significantly more likely to engage in a variety of unhealthy behaviors when the family meal isn't a regular occurrence in their home. Here are just some of the benefits you can provide your children by ensuring your family comes together regularly at the dinner table, according to the American College of Pediatricians:

- *Less Sex / Drugs / Alcohol*: OK, let's start with the big ones. Children / teens who participate in regular family meals are less likely to use drugs, alcohol and nicotine, and less likely to engage in sexual activity. They're also less likely to have friends who participate in the above risky behaviors. Now aren't those great reasons to make sure the family gets together at the dinner table as often as possible?
- *Academics*: Teens who enjoy frequent family dinners (at least three times a week) are more likely to achieve better grades in school compared to teens who sit down for a family meal two times or less per week.
- *Communication*: Family meals provide an opportunity for conversation / communication, enhancing language development and vocabulary, while allowing for discussion and debate, which can improve family relations and foster critical thinking / speaking skills.
- *family meals - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Structure*: Who wouldn't feel great knowing that on most days, they can come together with their family at a set place and time? Family meals give children structure, making them feel secure and safe, while allowing parents to monitor and address their children's moods in a consistent environment.
- *Less Stress*: Research suggests frequent family meals reduce emotional stress and contribute to higher overall satisfaction with life compared to teens who experience fewer family meals.

Heard enough? In our hectic, technology-driven world, families have plenty of times to do things apart (or at least disengaged from one another). Make family meals a priority – as you can tell from the above list of benefits, it's well worth the effort. Talk to your doctor for more information.

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