

[IMAGE]

The Family That Eats Together, Stays Together

In today's fast-paced society, the idea of the family sitting down to eat together may seem almost unnatural - but according to recent research, it may be the healthy thing to do. A study published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* shows that while some teenagers rarely sit down with their family to have dinner, eating together can be an important factor in a teenager's well-being, with benefits that go far beyond the dinner table.

More than 4,700 teenage boys and girls were surveyed and asked how often they ate meals with their families, and how close they felt to their parents. The researchers found that the more often teens ate meals with their family, the less likely they were to use drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Eating frequent family meals was also associated with fewer mental health problems, lower rates of depression and suicidal thoughts, and higher self-esteem. Teens who ate with their families were also more likely to do well in school.

Most people take the importance of having a family meal for granted, but as this study shows, there's more to eating together than an after-dinner belching contest. The family meal provides children with more than just a comfortable routine; it also offers them the opportunity to learn about manners, nutrition and good eating habits - and gives them an avenue to talk to, and connect with, their parents. Take the time to eat with your child at least once or twice a week - you'll both feel good about it.

Eisenberg ME, Olson RE, Neumark-Sztainer D, et al. Correlations between family meals and psychosocial well-being among adolescents. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* August 2004;158(8):792-796. For more information on general health, visit www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/general.

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