



One Family, One Meal

Do you feel like you must cook three or four meals and by the time you get to sit down and eat everyone else is done? This is a stress many families experience, but there are methods to limit this hassle. One method to lower the stress of family meals is to feed your child the same food you prepare for yourself. The way you prepare and present foods affects a child's ability and interest to try new foods.

Introducing solids

When children begin eating solids, mealtimes may feel overwhelming. Deciding what to feed your baby may be nerve-wracking and distracting from your own mealtimes. To ensure you and your baby are getting fed, try chopping, pureeing, or blending a small portion of your meal into a baby-friendly texture. For example, blending up your dinner of roasted chicken and cooked peas with a small amount of liquid ensures a balanced meal for you and your baby. You can use infant formula or breast milk as a liquid to help blend foods. Make sure if you give your child meat, you fully cook it, and limit the amount of sugar and salt you add for seasoning. When starting off, make sure the texture is smooth. Later, introduce different textures and work up to small bites of whole foods. By making baby-friendly food at home, you can make a much wider variety of foods than what is available at the store. This helps expand children's taste buds to enjoy diverse tastes. Making your own baby food can even save money!

New foods for your toddler

As your child grows, it is helpful to introduce them to foods that the rest of your family regularly enjoys while also trying some new foods for the whole family. Introducing new foods may be an uncomfortable experience for both you and your toddler. To help reduce this fear, try introducing new foods using family-style meals. Family-style meals are when all the options are presented, and your child gets to choose what goes on their plate and how much, usually serving themselves if they are old enough. Introducing new foods along with a few familiar foods will encourage your child to try something different. To support your child in trying new foods, show your child that you are also eating the new foods. Young children are strongly influenced by their caregivers' behaviors.

You deserve to enjoy meals just as much as the rest of your family. To encourage your child to eat what you cook, try keeping it simple. Instead of serving a casserole or mixed food, try serving all foods separately. For example, instead of making a chicken and veggie casserole, try cooking chicken, veggies, and cheese sauce all separately. This way your toddler can pick and choose what they want on their plate while also trying a little bit of something new.

Continuing family meals

As your family evolves, continuing family meals can be beneficial for many reasons. Family meals promote food variety which is essential for healthy growth and nutrition. Encourage older children to get involved by letting them make some mealtime decisions and help in the kitchen. Family meals also develop children's vocabulary and academic performance. Family mealtimes strengthen community and build family relationships. One meal, one family can help alleviate stress while also helping your children feel a sense of belonging.

Reference

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The Family Dinner Project (2024). Benefits of Family Dinners. *The Family Dinner Project*. <https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/about-us/benefits-of-family-dinners/>

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