The Family That Eats Together: Stays HEALTHY Together!

With our busy life’s and schedules it can be hard to get the family to sit down together to eat meals, but not too long ago there was a time when eating a family meal together was a priority and no one was excused from missing a meal together with the family, How times have changed, but it is time to get back to the basics. **Today September 23 is known as National Family day,** if there is only one day for you to get together with your family make today that one day!

There are many benefits to sitting down and eating together; According to the Family Dinner Project, sharing a family meal is good for the spirit, the brain and the health of all family members. Regular family dinners are associated with lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and depression, as well as higher grade-point averages and better self-esteem — not to mention lower rates of obesity and eating disorders in children and adolescents.

With Time and Money being a barrier to meeting this goal: try some of these simple strategies to help make family meals and success and priority!

- **Put your family first.** Look at your schedules and try to plan several meals together as a family for the week. Remember that meals don’t necessarily have to be the dinner meal. If breakfast is the best time to eat together as a family, that is perfectly fine.

- **Make it simple.** Meals do not need to be difficult to prepare. Planning ahead is key. Take inventory of your pantry and fridge and see what you already have on hand. Check your local grocery store ads to see if there are additional food items you can purchase on sale to complement the items you already have on hand to complete family meals. This will help save you time and money. Write your meal plan in your calendar or on a chalkboard to display so all family members know what is being served throughout the week.

- **Make it fun.** • Get the kids involved in choosing menu options and with meal preparation. They can even get involved in the grocery shopping. Come up with a menu theme for the week, such as “Mexican Week” or “Grilling Week.”
  - Have a friendly cooking challenge between members of the family to see who the better family chef is.
  - Play a game or tell a story that relates to the food items you prepared for the meal. Explore a mystery food of the week and incorporate that food into several dishes.
  - Pretend your dining room is a restaurant. You can even use special din-nerware and tablecloths to add to the ambiance of the room to make it an extra-special meal. Have the kids pretend they are waiters/waitresses. They can take orders and help serve dinner.