

# walk<sup>WITH a</sup>DOC Healthy Living Series

## Family Dinners: Good for the Mind, Body, & Soul

By Christine Butler, MS, RN, CPNP-PC/AC

How often do you sit down and share a meal as a family? Dinner is a time to tell stories, talk about the day, laugh, relax, and recharge. Unfortunately, less than one-third of American families dine together more than twice a week. Family meal time has been replaced by structured activities such as sports and homework, but research indicates we have lost more than just meals together. Family meal time in the home is the strongest predictor of academic achievement and decrease in behavioral issues in children. Not to mention the nutritional benefits as the average meal at a restaurant may have up to 60% more calories than a meal made at home. Eating at home is also great for your pocketbook with meals purchased out of the home costing almost twice as much as those prepared in the home.

### Benefits of Frequent Family Dinners:

- Lower risk of drug, tobacco, or alcohol abuse
- Lower risk of teen pregnancy
- Better academic performance
- Higher self-esteem
- Lower risk of depression and suicide
- Greater sense of resilience
- More affordable

### Nutrition Benefits of Family Dinners:

- Lower likelihood of developing eating disorders
- Lower rates of obesity
- Eat more fruits & veggies
- Eat less fried foods and soda

### Additional Tips

- It doesn't have to be dinner - any meal where the family gathers and converses counts.
- Avoid having the TV on in the background. Research shows meals eaten in front of the TV or with cell phones don't provide the same benefit as meals that are technology-free.
- Involve the kids in the cooking and cleaning process if possible. They will learn new skills, you'll have less work to do, and doing dishes has even been shown to reduce allergies in kids.
- Conversation can be about anything. Visit **[thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org)** for some great conversation starters and strategies for getting teens to open up.



Thanks to WWAD Charleston for this info!

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PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATES

[www.walkwithadoc.org](http://www.walkwithadoc.org)

- [thefamilydinnerproject.org/about-us/benefits-of-family-dinners](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/about-us/benefits-of-family-dinners)
- [myplate.gov/life-stages/families](http://myplate.gov/life-stages/families)
- [researchgate.net/publication/267720308](http://researchgate.net/publication/267720308)
- [health.gov](http://health.gov)