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## In the Know with Family Mealtime

### Children copy their parents' eating habits.

Parents need to set examples when it comes to practicing good eating habits.<sup>1,2</sup> Studies show that when young children observe their mothers eating an unfamiliar food, they are more likely to try new foods. Also, if mothers are unwilling to try new foods, children may copy their parents' same unwillingness. Furthermore, the "do as I say approach" can backfire.<sup>3</sup> Parents who insisted that their daughters eat fruits and vegetables ate fewer servings than their peers, who were not pressured. The researchers concluded that in order to increase children's intake of fruits and vegetables, parents need to increase their own intake. Also, encourage children to "try" rather than to "finish" their vegetables.



The family meal is an excellent opportunity for parents to model appropriate food behaviors, provide positive food-related parenting style, and give children access to a variety of foods.

### TV is eating up family mealtime.

Survey data shows that 42% of the time that Houston-area, middle-school children ate dinner at home, they were watching TV.<sup>4</sup> Nearly 300 fourth- through sixth-graders took part in this one-week survey, which included food records of 1775 dinners from a diverse ethnic group of families. Of particular concern, overweight children reported eating nearly 50% of their dinners while watching TV compared to just 35% of their normal-weight peers.

The researchers emphasize, "*Families meals are key to helping children learn healthy eating and life skills. Families need to turn off the television during meals and engage their children.*"<sup>5</sup>

**Parents need to know that making mealtime part of their family routine may not be as difficult as they may think.** Even though parents and teens cite their hectic schedules as reasons to be absent from home during mealtime<sup>6</sup>. 79% of teens consider eating dinner at home as one of their top rated activities with their families.<sup>6</sup>

#### References

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