

# KID'S Corner

## DINNERTIME THE NEW FAMILY MEAL

by Sarah Muntel, RD

**DINNERTIME HAS CHANGED. THINK BACK SEVERAL DECADES TO SAY THE 1950'S. DADS CAME HOME FROM WORK, MOMS HAD SPENT THE AFTERNOON PREPARING A HOME COOKED DINNER FROM SCRATCH, AND THE KIDS ALL GATHER AROUND THE DINNER TABLE.**

For many, this version of the family dinner has become a thing of the past. Between kids' sports schedules, after school activities, and families with two working parents, you will find the dinner table empty in many homes evening after evening. Instead, parents race from work to the nearest fast food joint and are on to soccer practice. It's time to make a change.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EATING TOGETHER

You may ask yourself... "What's the harm? It's just dinner!" There are several reasons why eating as a family is important! First, let's talk nutrition. The American Academy of Pediatrics states kids who eat three or more family meals together are more likely to be in a normal weight range and have better eating habits. Without a family dinner at home, parents find themselves grabbing fast food on their way home from work or picking up a greasy pizza on the way home from a school event. Eating on the run is a big contributor to the nation's obesity problem. Fast food is loaded with fat and calories, and so are the convenient foods that have become a staple in many homes.

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Believe it or not, family dinners go beyond nutrition. The *Journal of Adolescent Health* states more frequent family dinners are related to:

- FEWER EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS
- GREATER EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING
- MORE TRUSTING AND HELPFUL BEHAVIORS TOWARD OTHERS
- HIGHER LIFE SATISFACTION

Multiple other studies show kids who eat family dinners perform better academically and have better relationships with parents. There's a lot to be said about family time together.

Wow! All that, just from dinner. Think about it, dinner is a time to sit down and have some quality family time. It is your time to reconnect with your kids, discuss the day's events, and enjoy time with each other. Many people think, "No way! Our family can't fit this into our schedule." Think again. There are many ways you can sneak a little family dinner into your daily lives.

## NUTRITION CHECK:

Family dinners don't have to be complicated or stressful. There are many simple ways to ensure your family has a nutritionally balanced meal at the evening hour. Check out the tips below.



### PLAN AHEAD

For many people, schedules are crazy and there is less time to prepare meals. That does not mean family dinners have to go down the drain. It also doesn't mean dinners should consist of fast food burgers and pizza. Every day needs to start with a plan. Take some time to meal plan and brainstorm about meals that can easily fit into your evening. Think about your week and your evening commitments and attempt to schedule your meals around them. Many meal planners schedule a week of meals in advance so you don't run into a jam. Plan ahead and hit the grocery store, too. Having the ingredients on-hand can be half the battle. When looking at your schedule, you can fit in some quick easy dinners for crazy nights and some that require a little more preparation for your leisurely dinners at home.



### REALIZE IT DOESN'T HAVE TO TAKE HOURS

Do you just have a few minutes? That's ok! Your dinners do not need to be gourmet! Make it simple

on the nights that are crazy. Turkey sandwiches on whole grain bread with a cup of fresh fruit can be a great dinner and prepared in less time than it takes to go through the drive thru. Aim to have a lean protein at each meal, whole grains and a serving or two of vegetables and fruit.



### PREPARE AND FREEZE AHEAD

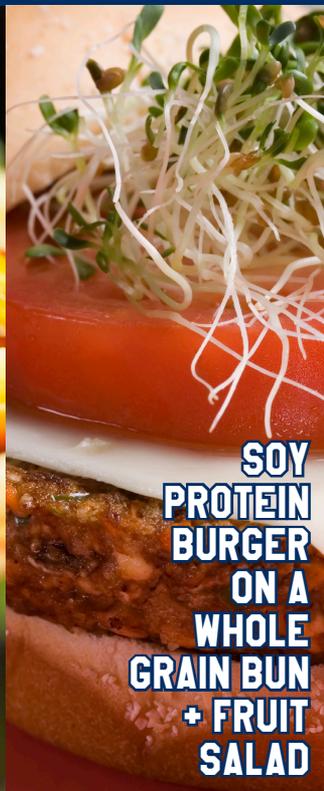
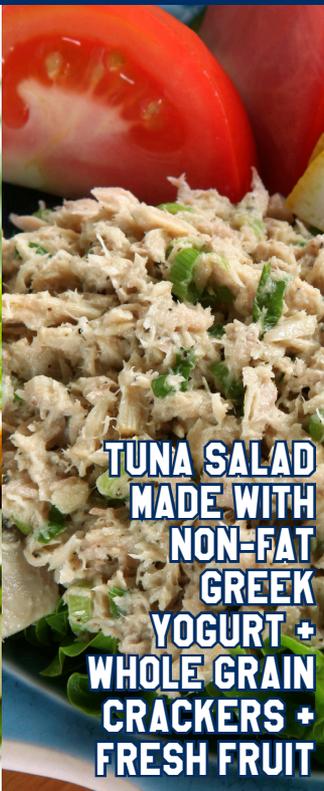
Some days you may have just enough time to throw something in the oven before you run out the door. Prepare in advance for those days. The next time you are making lasagna, make two. Throw one in the freezer and you'll be set for a quick night's dinner.



### HAVE A LIST OF HEALTHY FAST FOOD

Let's be real, some days get crazy and fast food has to be an option. Pick your favorite restaurants and be aware of what you can choose at different places. A grilled chicken sandwich with a side salad can be a great dinner on the fly. Grilled hamburgers are always better options than fried chicken.

# QUICK MEAL IDEAS



**ENGLISH MUFFIN PIZZAS - WHOLE GRAIN MUFFINS + PIZZA SAUCE + CHEESE + VEGGIE TOPPINGS, SERVED WITH A SIDE SALAD**

**PRE-CHOPPED/ WASHED SALAD + ROTISSERIE CHICKEN + WHOLE GRAIN BREAD**

**TUNA SALAD MADE WITH NON-FAT GREEK YOGURT + WHOLE GRAIN CRACKERS + FRESH FRUIT**

**FROZEN STIR FRY VEGETABLES + CHICKEN TENDERS + LOW SODIUM SOY SAUCE + WHOLE GRAIN RICE**

**SOY PROTEIN BURGER ON A WHOLE GRAIN BUN + FRUIT SALAD**

## LOOK AT LIFE BALANCE

Even though you may know what to prepare, you may be scratching your head wondering where you can fit in all this good nutrition. It can be done with a little planning.



### TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR SCHEDULE:

Spending time with your family is so very important, we all know that. If you seem to always see your family in passing, and miss real time together, it may be time to look at your family's schedule. Is your family over scheduled? Is there something you can switch from your schedule to make family dinners more of a priority?



### QUALITY VS. QUANTITY:

Take advantage of the family dinners you do have. No one can spend every dinner together, but take advantage of the ones you have. Make sure you turn the television off, put down your phone, and spend some time together.



### IT'S NOT JUST DINNER:

Dinners can be a struggle for many, but think outside the box. There are other opportunities



### TAKE DINNER AWAY FROM THE TABLE:

What if your kids have multiple sports practices in the evening. Take dinner to them. Consider a picnic on the baseball field or meet mom at work with a healthy dessert on her late night in the office.



### SCHEDULE TIME LIKE YOU DO A MEETING:

You wouldn't skip an important work meeting, would you? Add a couple evening events with your family just as you would a work meeting. Schedule this with all your family members.

for you to eat as a family. What about having a family breakfast on Saturday morning or try for a family lunch on Sunday afternoon.



## KEEP DINNER FUN

The concept of family dinners are foreign to many people. What do you do to keep your kids engaged? It's important to remember a few things.



### HAVE A STRICT NO ELECTRONICS POLICY

This counts for parents too. Park all your cell phones, iPods, and laptops at the door and be ready to engage with your family.



### SHARE INFO ABOUT YOUR DAY

Have some ice breakers ready. What was the funniest thing that happened at school today? Who was someone new you talked to today? What was your favorite subject at school today? Take turns asking each other questions.



### HAVE FUN PLANNING AHEAD

Spend some time brainstorming about other fun activities. What would be a fun family vacation? What are other ways your family could spend time together?



### MAKE IT A GAME NIGHT

Instead of just dinner, how about incorporating a card game or a board game. This can keep everything lively for sure!



### GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

Don't let the burden of planning and preparing meals fall on one person. Use a rotation and have each family member take turns on what the menu will be and helping prepare it.



### TRY NEW THINGS

Family dinner is a great place to try new things. Try new foods, explore new cuisine, and expand your horizon. How about Indian Food on Friday or trying spaghetti squash on Monday. Take a vote if you want to add it to the menu rotation.

## BE PATIENT

This certainly can't happen overnight, and no one expects that. Small changes throughout time can make a big difference in your family's health and wellbeing. Begin by adding one meal at a time and see what your family thinks! You are likely to see a lot of positive, from just an evening or two!

### *About the Author:*

*Sarah Muntel, RD, is the Bariatric Coordinator at Community Bariatric Surgeons in Indianapolis, IN. She has 15 years of experience working with bariatric patients and loves to work with people as they change their lives and improve their health. Her favorite part of her job is her weekly Support Group. In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her husband and three children.*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



**JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](http://OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN)**

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