



# Reclaim Dinner Time Together

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Last week I spoke with two women about family dinners. One woman said, "I'm lucky if my family eats together 3 times a week." The other woman replies, "We haven't used our kitchen table in weeks. If we eat together, it's because we are watching the same TV show." Sound familiar? Here's an update of the national trends on family meals:

- Over 50% of families surveyed nationally report eating together 3-5 times a week.
- As children grow up the frequency of family meals declines. Twice the number of 12-year-olds (55%) as 17-year-olds (26%) report eating dinner with their families 7 days a week.
- About 27% of families reported eating meals together 7 days a week while about 23% of families ate meals together 2 or fewer days a week.

So what difference does it really make? Well, maybe more than you think. The list of benefits and reduced risks associated with eating together as a family are tremendous, especially for children and young teens. A positive relationship exists between the following child wellbeing indicators and eating family meals together (as family dinners increase, so do positive child wellbeing outcomes): academic achievement, language development, vocabulary growth and a better commitment to learning, positive values, better sleep, increased fruit and vegetable intake (in both children and adults)

What's more, as the number of family dinners together goes up, the following high-risk behaviors go down:

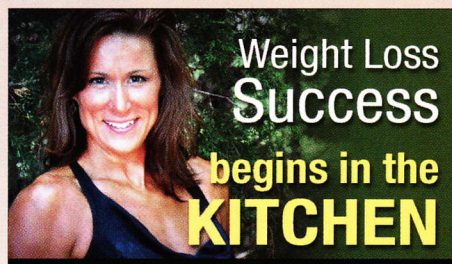
- Substance use
- Sexual activity
- Behavior problems in school
- Depressive symptoms
- Body mass index/ body mass index percentile (children and adults)
- High fat/sugar intake (children and adults)
- Disordered eating

In fact, the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reports that teens having family dinners fewer than three nights a week are at two to four times the risk for substance abuse compared to teens who have dinner with their families five to seven nights per week.

There is no single daily activity that we do as a family with more regularity and no better opportunity to develop the physical and mental health of your family, especially from childhood into adolescence. If you think you're too busy to invest the time, think again.

Here's my challenge to you Denton County: Choose just one more night this next week to invite your entire family for Dinner Time Together. For college students and single professionals, broaden your scope of family to include neighbors and friends. Share your experiences at [facebook.com/Love-to-Live-Well](http://facebook.com/Love-to-Live-Well). Bon Appetit! ■

See [lovetolivewell.com](http://lovetolivewell.com) for references to this article and free tips to make this challenge easier.



**Stacey M. Harris, MS, NHE-CPT**

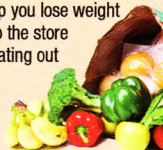
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