



### Busy Families Can Still Share Healthy Dinners

As the school year starts up again, parents will be picking one kid up from daycare only to drop another off at football practice, and in between they are expected to keep everyone happy and healthy by serving a delicious meal. When everyone is on the go, how can families sit down and enjoy a meal together?

One secret is to prepare a "first course" the night before for the family to eat while the main course is cooking. This could be a salad or just vegetables with low-fat dip. Whole fruits and raw vegetables are great snacks for keeping hunger at bay without spoiling appetites. Unlike cookies and chips, these healthy foods cannot be quickly eaten in one or two bites. Family members will spend more time chewing and less time filling up on junk food. Low-fat or non-fat yogurt, pieces of cheese and a glass of milk help fulfill the daily dairy requirement and can keep families satisfied while dinner is cooking.

Having everyone help with dinner is another great strategy. Not only will family members be spending time together, but children's minds will be kept off their hungry stomachs and dinner will be ready sooner. Some preparation time also can be eliminated by setting the dinner table in the morning.

For days that are going to be especially busy, parents can prepare a quick meal, like a ready-to-heat casserole, the night before. Add a salad, bread and milk and families can quickly sit down for a full meal. Even if this meal lasts only a few minutes, at least everyone will be eating healthy and spending time together.

Cookbooks at the library and the Internet are full of ideas for quick meal recipes. If a family likes certain recipes, they can follow the example of many food service institutions and set up a meal cycle. Maybe a family can repeat meals about every 10 days. Knowing what will be cooked can help eliminate preparation time. Switching meal days and adding in new recipes can change up the menu and keep meals from getting boring. And while eating healthy is important, don't be afraid to make Friday family pizza night.