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September is Family Meal Month. If you are like the majority of families, this can be a challenge. As kids get older, they become involved in extra- curricular activities and may even have part time jobs along with a full day of school. Parents are involved in their communities and work as well. Research shows us that it is very important to take time and have family meals.

Here are some benefits to having regular family meals together:

- Children who eat with their families tend to have better academic performance.
- Higher self-esteem. Meals are not just nourishment; they are a time to find out what is going on with one another. It also generates conversation about some of the tough things that may be happening in their school world.
- Family meals lower the rate of at risk behaviors like teen pregnancy and substance abuse.
- Family meals lower the risk of depression and eating disorders.
- Family meals lower the rate of obesity.
- Family meals also help your food budget, food waste and insures that you are eating healthy.

Time seems to be a major factor when families report that they do not eat meals together. The solution is not easy. You will need to look at a calendar with everyone's events and block off time for meals. In addition, if you attend a sporting event together as a family, you can be creative and have a family tailgate meal. The key components to family meal- time is food and being together, if you tailgate, this is fulfilling that definition.

Eating at fast food restaurants adds up. If you do a simple break down of cost of making homemade hamburgers versus going to a fast food restaurant, you will find that it is less expensive to make them at home and you control the sodium in the hamburger. Here is a quick breakdown:

- 80% lean hamburger, on sale for \$1.99 ( 4 servings, 4 ounces each)
- Hamburger Buns, on sale for \$1.00 (8 per package)
- Slice of American Cheese, slices on sale for \$1.75 (8 slices in package)

\*\*TOTAL Cost of 1 hamburger: \$.86

A lot of this will be family communication that emphasizes the importance of coming together at the dinner table. As your children get older, you may have only 3-4 meals a week together and that is ok. Make the time count. Prepare the meal together, eat the meal together and do the cleanup of the meal together. Showing your family how important it is to eat together as a family will be a life-long behavior that will have good positive impact not only on your family but with future generations as well. Your children will grow up to have their own family and will implement the importance of eating together for their children as well.