

FAMILY MEALS

Good for Your Health

As pediatricians and public health and school district officials continue to sound the alarm about the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, it should comfort you to know that one of the most powerful preventions lies firmly in your control: Eat together as a family and get everyone involved.

Extend mealtime — to the market,

Bring the kids shopping with you, to involve them in meal planning before you even hit the kitchen. When hitting the grocery store or farmers' market discuss choices before you put things in the cart.

Drink up right.

Serve water or milk at meals; ban soda and sweetened drinks. Not only will that benefit everyone's waistline, but the next dentist's visit might be more pleasant!

Give everyone a task.

Have young ones set the table or rinse veggies before dinner; older kids can peel, chop or stir. Don't forget the cleanup!

Practice "stealth health."

There are myriad parenting books on how to sneak in veggies, but try one of these nutrition boosters:

Swap white-flour pasta for one made with whole grains; try a whole-grain pancake mix; serve up pureed soups or low-fat fruit smoothies to get in more produce.

Include favorites.

On a rotating basis, let each family member select one food to include in the meal. What they choose to try might surprise you and will give the whole family the opportunity to experiment with new varieties.



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