



## Conversation Starters

- ▶ What is the best thing that happened to you today?
- ▶ If you could start a new family tradition, what would it be?
- ▶ What does it mean to be a friend?
- ▶ What's one thing you are proud of?
- ▶ What is your favourite movie or book? And why?



# Take Back the Dinner Hour

Families sitting and eating together is a tall order in this fast-paced, too-much-to-do world. Today's families have hectic schedules of long work days, appointments, pick ups and drop-offs at swimming lessons, volleyball, piano lessons and the list goes on. When do you have time to plan and prepare a healthy sit-down family meal?

## Family meal facts

Eating together promotes good nutrition and helps develop healthy eating habits. Kids who eat meals with their families consume more vegetables and fruit, and take in more fibre, calcium, iron and some vitamins. They also drink less pop and eat less fried foods.

Eating together has a positive impact on a child's emotional, intellectual and social development and improves family communication. Talking about the events of the day reduces stress. Family meals are also an opportunity to pass along food traditions.

Eating together gives parents an opportunity to role model healthy eating practices. The family meal allows children to learn about choosing healthy foods, being open to trying new foods and listening to their feelings of fullness.

## How can I get my family back to the table?

**Take time to plan.** Plan a week's worth of meals and do your shopping ahead of time. Having what you need on hand makes meal preparation go smoother and faster. Prepare as many meals as you can on the weekends when you have more time — then just heat up dinner on the busier days.

**Call in the troops!** The family meal can be more than just sitting at the table together. Let the kids plan a meal; they will be more likely to enjoy it. Your kids can also help with meal preparation, setting the table, and clean-up.

**Turn off the TV, iPod, video games, computer and let voicemail or the answering machine kick in when dinner's on the table!** The electronic gadgets in our life only serve as a distraction and take away from the good that comes from eating together and talking.

**Eating together doesn't have to happen at dinner.** Depending on your family's schedule, breakfast may be a better time to get together.

## Quick and Healthy Family Meals

**“Make your own wrap” night** — offer up a selection of cut-up leftover meat or deli meats, vegetables such as lettuce, shredded carrots, spinach, tomatoes, cucumber, shredded cheese — cheddar, mozzarella or parmesan and top with a salad dressing of your choice. This is a fast and tasty meal that gives your family lots of choice and makes time for sitting and talking together.

**Chili and cornbread night** — dust off the slow cooker for a fantastic family meal. Make a chili (or any great slow cooker meal) and it will be ready when you come home. Cornbread or biscuits are fast and easy to make and will round out this healthy meal, or choose a whole grain bun from the store.

**Lasagna** — how is lasagna a quick meal you may ask? Lasagna is a great make ahead and freeze meal. When making lasagna, double batch it. Having a pan of lasagna ready made in the freezer makes for a quick weeknight meal. While the lasagna is in the oven, put together a simple salad and spend some time reading or playing cards with your kids!

**Try “Breakfast for Dinner” night** — some breakfast foods make great quick and easy dinner foods. Try homemade pancakes or waffles topped with yogurt and berries or fruit (fresh or frozen work equally well). This is a balanced meal — 3 food groups — that your family is sure to enjoy. Scrambled eggs with a side of vegetables works well too.

