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Feed the Body and Mind with Family Meals

Between work, school, sports, doctor's appointments, and family commitments, we are pulled in 100 different directions every minute of the day. Sometimes we feel like we don't have time to complete all of the important things on our To Do lists, let alone have quality time with loved ones. Over the last few decades, this increased busyness has decreased the frequency with which we have family meals. And while many of us struggle with finding the time to sit down and eat together, the unintended consequences may be impacting us and our children more than we realize.

Studies have shown that families who eat together regularly tend to consume more fruits and vegetables, and less fried food, soda, and unhealthy fats like saturated and trans fats. According to a study published in the Archives of Family Medicine, these families also consume more fiber, calcium, iron, and vitamins B6, B12, C and E, which likely contributes to stronger bones, more energy and a more robust immune system.

In addition to the benefits for the whole family, the youngest members benefit even more. Kids who share a family meal at least three times per week are more likely to maintain a healthy weight for their height and tend to have healthier eating patterns overall according to a study published in Pediatrics. The Importance of Family Dinners VII, a report from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, also found that teens who eat with their families at least five times per week are up to four times less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. Beyond the greater physical health experienced by kids through family meals, they also tend to have better academic performance, are more connected and communicative at home, exhibit better language and communication skills, and experience less depressive feelings.

Need help making family meals happen? Registered Dietitians in the community are good sources of information to help families make healthy choices. Here are some ideas and a recipe to get things started:

- Keep it simple: Meals don't have to elaborate to be enjoyable. Try a green salad with baked chicken breast for a tasty and healthy meal.
- Prepare more when you have time: Main dishes can be prepared and frozen for later use. That way you will only need to reheat.
- Be flexible: Any meal eaten together is a family meal, it's not just dinner. Share breakfast or lunch, whatever works!

God's Love We Deliver is proud to contribute to the effort of family meals by providing meals for our clients' dependents through our Home Delivered Meal Program. Not only do our clients who are dealing with a severe illness receive customized, nutritionally appropriate meals delivered to their homes, but their kids do also. Children who are 12 years old or younger receive meals from a menu developed specifically to meet their unique nutrition needs, while adolescents receive meals from our regular menu. The child-sized portions of kid favorites like turkey meatballs with spaghetti give them the nutrients they need to grow and be healthy.

Through our dependents' meal service, our clients' families are able to reap the benefits of a family meal. In fact, last year 80% of our family clients indicated that their children are eating more nutritiously than they would otherwise as a result of the food they receive from God's Love. Over 86% of clients said that receiving food for themselves and their children helped them to live more independently and improved the whole family's quality of life. And perhaps most importantly, 83% of our clients with dependents felt less stress about providing food for their kids as a result of the children's meal program. We believe that less stress gives our clients more energy to focus on their own health and healing.

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