



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Family Dinners

January 2004

“Family dinners are the key to having *parent power*,” according to Joseph Califano, Jr., founding Chairman of the Board and President of the National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA).

How often does your family eat an evening meal together? Fifty-three percent of Southwest Wisconsin teens report they eat three or more evening meals per week with their families based on results from the 2001 Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 7th to 12th graders. Fifty-five percent of males report eating three or more evening meals with their family, as compared to 51% of females.

Figure 1 shows that there are also grade differences in who eats three or more evening meals with their families. Sixty-one percent of 7th-9th graders report this, while only 46% of 10th-12th graders do. In fact, 20% of 10th-12th graders report eating no evening meals with their family.

As youth get older, their schedules seem to get busier and they also enjoy spending more time with their friends. However, eating meals as a family is important not only for young children, but is shown to have positive impacts throughout the teenage years.

CASA reports that families who eat dinner together are less likely to have teens who use illegal drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.

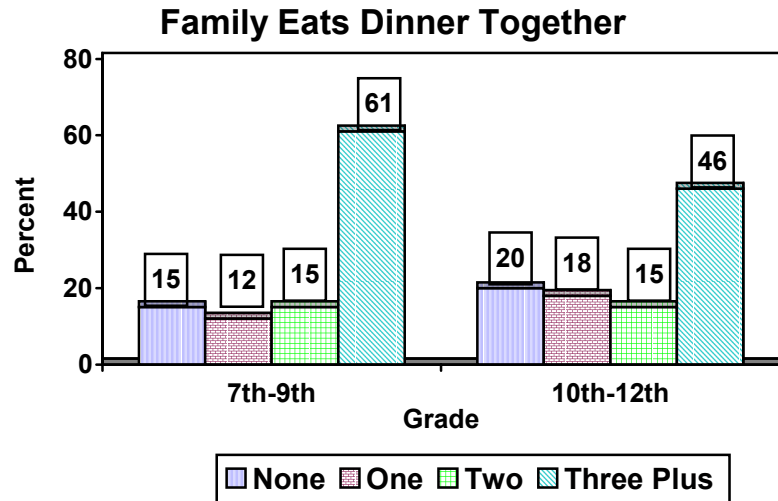


Figure 1: Percentage of student responses to the question, “How many nights per week does your entire family sit down to an evening meal?”

IMPACTS OF FAMILY MEAL TIME

Figure 2 highlights some the positive impacts of eating three or more evening meals as a family--

- 55% of youth who report receiving As and A/Bs also report eating three or more evening meals as a family per week.
- 60% of youth who strongly agree they are satisfied with themselves report eating three or more evening meals as a family per week.
- 65% of those youth who do not smoke report eating three or more evening meals as a family per week.
- 58% of those youth who do not drink alcohol report eating three or more evening meals as a family per week.

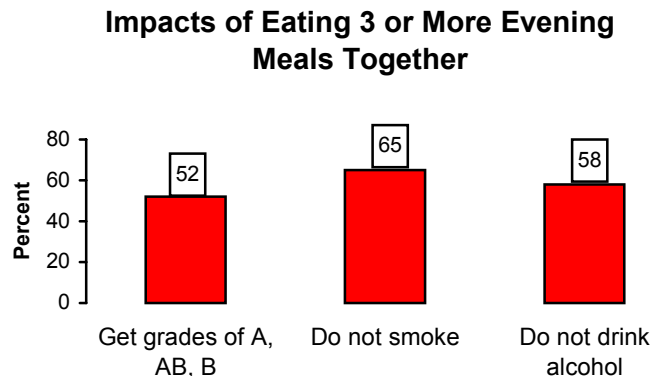


Figure 2: Percentage of youth who eat 3 or more evening meals with family

Family meal time can be a time for children to talk with parents in a caring, sharing environment. It helps parents keep in touch with their children and aids in monitoring their behavior. By keeping regular evening meal times, parents express their value for family time and youth have a chance to tell their parents about their lives and daily experiences.

Eating meals as a family can also have other impacts on the family's health and financial status. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that half of the dinners consumed by overweight Americans are eaten in front of the TV. They also state that families spend over \$2000 additional dollars on meals eaten away from home.

Family meals may be also healthier than other meals. Research by Harvard University with elementary aged children indicated that meals eaten with the family are higher in essential nutrients including

vitamins and minerals. And the Baylor College of Medicine reports that family meals generally include 50% more fruits and vegetables than meals eaten away from home.

HINTS TO MAKE FAMILY MEALS SPECIAL

- ☺ Involve family members in preparing meals and baking foods.
- ☺ Let everyone choose their favorite food and help prepare it.
- ☺ Have breakfast in the sleepiest family member's bed.
- ☺ List leftovers on paper like a menu. Let everyone place an order.

Together examine how your family spent their time in the last week. Set a weekly goal to eat three evening meals as a family. Work out a schedule to include family meal time, work, school, and fun.

Sources: www.searchinstitute.org , www.parentsplace.com, www.cwfa.org

Remember, Parents Make A Difference!

HOW DOES YOUR FAMILY RATE?

Complete this report card as a family. Circle your family's score. What do they tell you about your family time?

<p>COMMUNICATION Strong families communicate clearly, openly and frequently. Rate your family's communication skills.</p>	<p>0 2 4 6 8 10</p>	<p>Family members keep thoughts and opinions to themselves.</p>	<p>Family members are always open and honest with each other.</p>
<p>TOGETHERNESS Healthy families like to spend their free time together. Rate your family's togetherness.</p>	<p>0 2 4 6 8 10</p>	<p>Family members do not spend their free time with each other.</p>	<p>Family members spend quality time together.</p>

Adapted from Family Report Card, Alliance for Children and Families, 2000.

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series. This issue was written by Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County and edited by Ruth Schriefer, UW-Extension Iowa County, Christina Kenney, UW-Extension Grant County, and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391 or on the web at http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parent_resources.html