

Family Meal Times

Issue 2

Make Family Meals a Tradition

At the Family Table

What are your favorite family memories? Did you have big Sunday dinners or family get-togethers on special holidays?

A **family tradition** has been defined as an activity that is significant and meaningful for family members and is coordinated and repeated through time. Building family traditions that last and have personal meaning for family members helps build strong family relationships.

Enjoy Family Traditions

Family traditions can be grouped into three main categories: traditions of **connection**, traditions of **celebration** and traditions of **community**. Each type of family tradition offers family members an opportunity to feel included and connect with each other in a meaningful setting. Family meals are a great activity that can be repeated regularly and can fit into any of these categories of tradition.

Connect with Family Meals

Family traditions of connection revolve around regular, consistent opportunities for family members to share an experience that is meaningful. They offer a sense of belonging to all. For family meals, family connections can take a variety of forms. A family might eat tacos twice a month on the same night of the week (Taco Tuesday). A mother and daughter might eat a favorite weekly breakfast together on the back porch.

Establish regular patterns for family meals that are unique and meaningful. Make them memorable by considering these questions:

- Who plans and prepares the meal?
- When is the meal served?
- Who is present at the meal?
- How are family members involved in the meal?
- What kind of food is served?
- What topics or activities accompany the meal?



Celebrate with Family Meals

Family members observe family traditions of celebration in appreciation for an individual, an event, a holiday or other chosen memory. Celebration meals, such as the following, often include special foods:

- Birthdays
- Cultural celebrations
- Family reunions
- Father's or Mother's Day
- Graduation
- Holidays (Thanksgiving, Independence Day, etc.)
- Weddings

A Memory of Family Meals

"We observed milestones (like birthdays) and accomplishments by giving that person the 'you are special today' red plate on which to eat."

Food and Family Q&A

Question: *I'm in charge of organizing the meals for a family reunion. I'm excited about seeing my cousins, but I don't know where to start. Can you help?*

Reunions are a great time to catch up with friends and family, share family memories and create new ones. A successful event begins with planning. Don't try to do everything by yourself. Choose a simple menu, enlist help (a "food planning committee") and delegate the work.

You don't want foodborne illness to be part of the memory of this family event. Perhaps the cousins who live closest can prepare the "hot" foods and those who are traveling can bring the less perishable items, such as bread, crackers or cookies. For more information about cooking for groups, ask your local office of the NDSU Extension Service for a copy of the food safety publication "Cooking for Groups" (FN585) or visit the NDSU Extension Service Web site (click on food safety/consumers then online publications).

Quick Tip: Brown extra ground beef or prepare double batches of casseroles or chili. Freeze in meal-sized containers so you have an "emergency meal" or two available to heat and eat! These are easy to share with someone in need!

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A Family Meal Recipe

Here's an easy recipe that kids can help prepare. It makes a tasty meal for a family event.

Crockpot Cowboy Beans

- 4 strips bacon, fried crisp, drained and crumbled
- 1 lb. lean or extra lean ground beef, browned and drained
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ¼ c. brown sugar
- 1 c. ketchup (low-sodium)
- ¼ c. vinegar
- ¼ c. mustard
- 1 (15-ounce) can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can butter beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can lima beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (28-ounce) can baked beans (do not drain)

Brown meat and fry bacon. Mix all ingredients and cook in a slow cooker on high for three hours or low for eight hours.

Makes 12 servings.

Each serving has 260 calories, 6 grams (g) fat, 34 g carbohydrate and 490 milligrams sodium.

Menu Idea

Cowboy Beans, tossed salad, whole-wheat dinner rolls, mandarin oranges and low-fat milk

Eat Smart. Play Hard. Together

For more information about food and families, visit this NDSU Extension Service website: www.ndsu.edu/eatsmart

"Eat Smart. Play Hard." is an initiative of the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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