

PinkParents..Family Time...Reinventing Sunday Night Dinners.

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For many of us, eating dinner together as a family has become a lost art. From long work days and completing household chores to carpooling and homework, family dinners have quickly become second place to our hectic schedules and lifestyles. Dance lessons, band practice, and softball games have led to well-rounded children, but have also resulted in busy afternoons. Since weekdays can be the most hectic and families tend to get home at different times, I encourage families to set a new tradition of coming together on Sunday nights to enjoy their dinner together.

Our busy lifestyles are leading many families to regularly order pizza or takeout from the nearby sandwich shop. Eating dinner on the couch in front of the TV has become the norm for far too many. But, busy schedules shouldn't have to compromise our commitment to quality family time spent together!



Planning one weekly meal can be an activity for the whole family to look forward to and participate in. We all are aware of the studies that reveal that eating dinner together as a family helps keep communication open and can instill healthy eating habits early on. This is a great time to connect and provide a platform to really listen and relate to each other in a positive way.

To make next Sunday night the first of your regularly scheduled family dinner nights, I have outlined a few pointers and techniques to help get you started.

- **Plan ahead.** To truly maximize your time together, plan out all the details of your meal before Sunday evening. This means writing out your grocery list and heading to the market to pick up your ingredients. If you really want to get ahead, wash and cut your veggies in the morning. This can help avoid any last minute stress, so you can fully enjoy time spent together as a family.
- **Nobody expects you to be June Cleaver.** We all have varying tastes and routines. Embrace what works best for *your* kids and family. If eating at 4:00pm instead of 6:00pm better suits your kid's bedtime then go for it!
- **Make it interactive.** Preparing the meal can be a family affair, too. By doing so, you're not only spending quality time together, but your children are encouraged to widen their taste preferences. Your kids will feel as though they have truly contributed to the success of dinner. They may not be old enough to chop the vegetables, but they can always help create meal ideas or set the table. And, maybe one day they'll cook you dinner for a change.
- **No TV.** Your family night should be about bonding, spending quality time together and catching up on the week's activities. When your kids grow up, their best memories won't be of watching a TV sitcom. Their best memories will be of the time spent together with the people they love and care about. As an alternative, take the time, either before or after dinner, to play a board game or a rousing game of charades together.
- **Experiment.** Try out what works for your family. Since summer is just around the corner, perhaps setting up a picnic in your backyard or on the front porch may be a fun alternative to eating at the kitchen table. If chicken is your dinner staple, open your oven to fresh alternatives. Eating seafood not only can do wonders for your health, but fish in particular is an excellent source of protein without the high saturated fat that many meats contain.
- **Create new atmosphere.** Wrap up your meal to go and pack up your picnic essentials. Take advantage of the summer weather and head to your local park or garden. Having a sunset backdrop is the perfect way to enjoy your Sunday dinner. If your schedule allows, head to the park early with a few toys or a Frisbee. Work up your appetite by playing with the ones you love most.
- **Avoid the heat!** Summertime often brings unpredictable heat waves, leaving many of us running from our stoves. If this sounds familiar to you, take advantage of other resources available in your kitchen. Pick up a microwaveable (and tasty!) frozen seafood dish, such as Lemon Dill Salmon from High Liner Foods Sea Cuisine™ line. Pair it with your favorite veggies and rice. You'll have your Sunday night dinner ready in less than 30 minutes without even turning the oven or stove on.

The value in reinventing Sunday's family dinners are well worth the effort it takes to revive them. You'll be creating a lifetime of memories with the people who are most important to you.