Weighing In June 2017

The Table Principal

Approximately 15 years ago my wife Terri went to a conference that was on how to keep your family together. One of the topics that they discussed was why families who sit around the table had closer relationships over the years than those that did not. Recently a study carried out by the European Congress on Obesity this past May proved again that children who do not eat dinner with their parents at least twice a week are more likely (40%, in fact), to be overweight than those who did.

In addition, a study conducted by the National Center on Addiction and substance abuse at Columbia University found that children who did eat dinner with their parents at least five to six days a week had less trouble with alcohol and drugs, eat healthier, show better academic performance and are closer to their parents than children who did not do this at all. So, what are the two reasons these adverse effects are associated with not eating meals together?

The first is simply that when we eat out, especially at inexpensive, fast food or take out places, we tend not to eat very healthy. These restaurants are also commonly chosen by kids who are eating either by themselves or with friends, not with their family. Alice Michael wrote, "The Book Cooked," and says meals that are eaten outside the home are almost uniformly less healthy than homemade foods. Most of these foods have a higher fat salt and caloric intake than those that are prepared at home."

The second reason is that the dinner table can be a unifier. Sharing around the table can be a reason to catch up and talk about your day. Think about it, this is one of the few times when family members are happy to put aside their work and take the time to listen to their children and each other.

Over the years we Americans grant ourselves pleasure over productivity. Americans work nearly 220 more hours per year than the average Frenchman. Mealtime in other countries is treated as sacred. In France, for instance, it is acceptable to eat by oneself. And one should never rush a meal. In Mexico, townspeople make it a point to gather together with friends and family in central areas like parks or town squares to share meals. In the villages of Cambodia villagers put out a call for locals to come and eat. They put mats on the ground and bring food to share with one another.

Alice Julie in her book "Eating Together" states that dining together can radically shift people's perspectives: she says that it reduces people's perception of inequality and diners are often different of races, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds and treat eachother more equal than they would in other social scenarios. There's something about sitting around the table that makes a big difference in people's attitudes. Maybe that's why the good Lord wanted us to break bread together.

Unfortunately, it hasn't always been the case with Americans. We don't put a priority on eating together and eating solely. In the 1950s Elizabeth David, an author, used data from three-quarters of the world's countries from an analysis that was done by The Economic and Cooperative Development Society of Europe. This is what she wrote about her findings: "great food is simple;" she says "meals don't have to come from fancy or trendy restaurants. Enjoying meals with loved ones makes the best meals we can have."

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Her equation for physical and psychological well-being is easy: eat simply and eat together always. However, for the average American family, who now spends nearly as much money on fast foods as they do on groceries, the simplicity is not so easily achieved. Perhaps the root problem is the cultural miss perception that America does have time to eat good food but just doesn't do it.

America, however, seems snobbish to take the time to eat a good food with one's family. Norman Rockwell's portrait of the American dinner table seems less middle-class and more of the upper-middle-class to the exclusive rich. Many families simply can't afford to have one parent stay home from work, spending his or her day cleaning and cooking a roast with a side of vegetables and potatoes for the spouse and the kids.

Most parents don't have time to cook, and many don't even know how, and the idea that one should spend extra money and time picking up produce at a supermarket rather than a bucket of Kentucky fried chicken seems unfeasible and unnecessary. It's understandable to want to save time and money. It's the same reason that small shops and mom-and-pop stores go out of business once Walmart moved into town. In this case is not the shop owner who suffers it's the consumer on of unhealthy rushed meals that are not good for you in the first place.

In the 1700s a French writer wrote "To eat his necessity but to eat intelligently is an art" there are many people who have obsessed over their food where it is sourced, where it is grown organically and the desire for culinary originality these folks are known as " foodies."

Perhaps to eat intelligently, one needs only to sit around the table and eat together. Wouldn't it be nice to eat healthy well prepared meals around your friends and families and you all join in cooking together. Perhaps eating together is not as difficult as it seems if you organize it and say everyone at the table at 6 o'clock. In my house growing up, everyone was expected to be at the dinner table and if you didn't show up, you are in big trouble with dad. New data shows that eating together has also led children to report better relationships with their parents.

In the Journal of Public health and nutrition, a study carried out by the American Public health Association annual meeting in New Orleans in November of last year questioned participants about what they had eaten over 24 hours. The survey looked at 9000 participant’s who on average were twenty years or older and asked questions about what the participants had been eating each 24 hour period for thirty days. Here's what they found: Eight percent of adults cook dinner once or less a week in the group combined, however they consumed 2,300 calories, 84 grams of fat, and 35 grams of sugar. Forty-eight percent of the participants cooked dinner six to seven times a week and they consumed 2,164 cal 81 g of fat and 19 g of sugar on a daily average. The researchers also found those who cooked home meals relied less on frozen food and were less likely to choose fast foods on occasion when they ate out!

Dr. Wilson of Johns Hopkins University wrote: "Obesity is an escalating public health problem that contributes to more serious health diseases, as we all know we have seen an increase in diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease." Dr. Wilson says "the evidence shows that people who cook at home eat more healthy diets. Moving forward it is important to educate the public about the benefits of cooking at home and sitting around the table. Identifying strategies that would encourage families to cook at home will help more than just the family itself regardless of how much they cook their choices all seem to be improved". Included also in this study they found that teens who eat with their family fewer than three times a week 20% get C's or lower on the report cards according to the University report. Only 9% of teens who frequently eat with their families did this poorly in school. Family meals give children an opportunity to have conversations with adults, as well as to pick up on how adults use their words with each other, which may explain why family dinner time is also thought to build children's vocabulary.

In the 2006 study by the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, children are offered some piece of sweet red pepper and asked to rate how they liked it. Then, each day after the next eight school days they were invited to eat as much of the peppers they wanted. On the final day, the kids were asked to rate again how much they liked it. At the end of the experiment, the children rated the pepper more highly and more palatable the more they consumed it. These results suggest a little more exposure and a little less "you can leave the table once you finish your broccoli" will teach children to enjoy new foods even if they don't like them at first.

Sadly, Americans rarely eat together anymore, in fact, the average American eats one in every five meals in their car, one in four Americans eat at least one fast food meal every single day and the majority of American families report eating a single meal together less than five to seven times a week.

In 2007 the average household spent $3465 on meals at home and $2,668 on meals away from home. According to a recent consumer expenditure report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. When you take into consideration that the $2,668 spent on meals away from home only accounts for about 30% of the meals that people have eaten according to the historical data. So that's about $8 per meal outside the house, and only about $4.50 per meal made in your kitchen, do the math people!

Some more data from the federal government Bureau of Labor and statistics, Americans spend more than 40% of their food budget on meals outside the home. Eating out can be convenient, but it is a caloric nightmare for many people. Portion sizes in restaurants just keep growing and growing. The average restaurant meal has as much as 70% more calories than a homemade meal. Studies show that when we are presented with more food, we eat more food which also causes us to have expanding waistlines. We also tend to eat more sugary foods and more carbonated drinks. So, the next time you consider going out to eat, maybe you should just go home and make a meal as a family together. You might be surprised how much you enjoy it.

Consider this last thought, the art of eating together is a form of hospitality for one another. In the family, we as Christians have the opportunity to be a biblical counterculture by inviting people to our home asking them to share a meal with us. We also have the chance to teach them how to eat correctly.

Blessings,
Chuck Shaffer MD

Spaghetti Squash with Roasted Peppers and Spinach.

Ingredients

- 1 medium spaghetti squash
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 pound chicken boneless, skinless (preferably, boneless skinless thighs), chopped
- 1 jar roasted red peppers, drained
- salt
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped
- 8 oz fresh spinach
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped

Directions: Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil to a large skillet, on medium-low heat. Add chopped chicken, red pepper flakes, and salt over all of the ingredients in the skillet, and cook on medium heat until chicken is cooked through and no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Add roasted red peppers, chopped fresh basil leaves, fresh spinach, and chopped garlic to the skillet with chicken, cook on medium heat about 3- 5 minutes until spinach wilts just a little. Remove from heat. Taste, and add more salt to taste, if needed. Cover with lid and keep off heat.

Mean while, chop spaghetti squash in half, remove pulp and seeds. Please in a microwave safe dish face down with ~ 1/4 C water and cook on high for 12 minutes or until squash is soft. Using a fork, scrape squash out of shell and into the pan with chicken and vegetables. Allow to simmer 1-2 minutes. Serve hot.

How to Read the Nutrition Label

When it comes to nutrition, most consumers look for the nutrition facts to find what they need to know. The nutrition facts are the found on a table that includes serving size, calories, fat, carbs (fiber, sugar), protein and sodium. Unfortunately, an untrained eye may look at the nutrition facts and see 0 carbs, 0 sugar and think they are good to go. The sad truth is that many times 0 sugar could also mean more artificial sweeteners or sugar alcohols have been added to the product which could lead to set backs weight wise.

So how can we tell if the facts are telling only partial truth? You need to look at the Ingredients label! The ingredients label is often located under the nutrition facts and is normally listed in fine print. Ingredients are always listed by weight (meaning that the first ingredient will make up the majority of the food item you are eating). Now, if you look at the diagram below, the first ingredient is Whole Grain Rolled Oats. This means that the product is primarily made up of this ingredient. The last ingredient is Citric acid, this means they use very little citric acid. More than likely for freshness. I know oatmeal is not legal on The Weigh Station's program, but it serves as a good example.

Another tip is to look at the endings of words that you more than likely aren't familiar with listed on the ingredients label. These may include words such as Dextrose, Maltose or Fructose. Notice all of these words end in –ose. This is an indication that they are sugars. There is one exception: Sucralose (Sucralose is the chemical name for Splenda). We allow three servings of Splenda per week. More than that could cause plateaus.

The other ending to look for is –ol. Maltitol, Erythritol and Xylitol for example are all sugar alcohols. Sugar alcohols have 2 calories per gram and are considered a low calorie form of carbohydrate. High amounts of sugar alcohols can lead to GI upset including gas, bloating and even diarrhea. Too many of them could also effect your ability to stay in ketosis.

Each food item can also vary widely when it comes to the ingredients they use. Stevia for example will differ from brand to brand. So will ketchup. Always take the time to read the fine print on the ingredients label to compare brands and make the best choice. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call the office or email me directly at tfoley@weighstation.net.

-Tricia Foley, MS, RD