



The Table Principle

Dr. Charles Shaffer

23 years ago, my wife Terri went to a conference centered around familial relationships. One of the topics discussed is why families who sit at the table together have closer relationships than those who do not sit together. This past May, a study conducted by the European Congress on Obesity proved that children who do not eat a meal with their parents at least twice a week are 40% more likely to be overweight than those who do regularly eat meals with their family.

Additionally, children who had meals with their parents 5 to 6 times a week had less trouble with alcohol and drugs, demonstrated better academic performance, and generally ate healthier.

So, what are the two reasons these adverse effects are associated with not eating meals together? First, when we eat out, especially at inexpensive, fast-food or takeout diners, most children tend to make poor choices. Alice Michael, the author of “The Book Cooked”, mentions how meals eaten outside the home

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are almost always significantly less healthy than homemade meals. The majority of these foods have higher fat, salt, and caloric intake than those prepared at home.

The second reason these effects are associated is due to the alienation felt when eating alone. The dinner table can be seen as a unifier. Sharing and passing items around a table helps facilitate conversation and enjoyment. Furthermore, this is one of the few times individuals are happy to put aside their work and take the time to be with their family or friends. Over the years, we have granted ourselves pleasure over productivity. Americans work nearly 220 hours more than the average Frenchman. Mealtime in other countries is sacred. For instance, Mexico prides itself in its food and how it brings people together. In Cambodia, they will make mountains of food and put out a call for locals to come eat.

Alice Julie, the author of “Eating Together”, believes that dining with others can radically shift people’s perspectives and mindsets. She states the activity reduces individual’s perceptions of inequality, especially when dining with others of different race, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

American culture no longer prioritizes the importance of family meals. In the 1950s, Elizabeth David, who is an American author, compiled data from three-quarters of the world’s countries from the Economic and Cooperative Development Society of Europe analysis. Elizabeth wrote “great food is simple: meals don’t have to come from fancy or trendy restaurants. The best meals are those that can be enjoyed with loved ones”. Her equation for physical and psychological well-being is easy: eat and eat together. Unfortunately, the simplicity of this idea is not so easily achieved for the average American family, who now spends nearly as much money on fast foods as they do on groceries. Perhaps the root problem is the cultural miss perception that America does have time to make and enjoy healthy options, but they simply just do not partake.

America has a snobbish attitude towards taking the time to eat a healthy meal 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 cannot afford to have one parent stay home from work and spend their day cleaning or cooking.

The majority of parents do not have the time to cook, and some do not even have the know-how. The idea that one should spend extra money and time picking out produce at a supermarket rather than a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken seems unfathomable and unnecessary. While it is understandable to want to save time and money, it is the same reason that mom-and-pop shops go out of business once Walmart moves into the area. While the shop owner suffers, so does the consumer due to unhealthy, rushed meals that are not good for you in the first place.

The average American eats one in every five meals in their car, and one in four Americans eats at least one fast food meal every day.

In the 1700s, a French author wrote “to eat is a necessity but to eat intelligently is an art”. There has been a growing number of people who are obsessed with their food and how it was sourced. Some individuals want to know this information for ethical reasons and others want to be sure they are choosing the best ingredients.

Perhaps one needs to only sit around a table and eat with others to eat intelligently. Wouldn't it be nice to eat healthy, prepared meals with your friends, families, and roommates? Eating together is not as difficult as it seems if you prepare and organize.

The Journal of Public Health and Nutrition published the results from a study in November of last year. 9,000 participants, aged 20 and over, were asked what they had eaten over the last 24 hours and their eating habit from the previous month. It was found that 8% of adults cooked dinner once or less a week and consumed a daily average of 2,300 calories, 84 grams of fat, and 35 grams of sugar. On the other hand, 48% of participants reported they cooked dinner 6 to 7 times a week and consumed a daily average of 2,164 calories, 81 grams of fat, and 19 grams of sugar. Researchers also found that those who frequently prepared homemade meals relied less on frozen foods and were less likely to choose fast foods when out.

Dr. Wilson of John Hopkins University stated, “obesity is an escalating public health problem that contributes to more serious health diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease”. He goes on to say “identifying strategies that would encourage families to cook at home would help more than just the family itself.

Recent data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics show that Americans spend more than 40% of their food budget on meals prepared outside the home. While eating out can be convenient, it can be costly and a caloric nightmare. Restaurant portion sizes continue to grow and contains about 70% more calories than if the meal was homemade. Additionally, studies show that when we are presented with more food, we tend to eat more.

The next time you are considering going out to eat, remember that it is most likely best to take the time to prepare a healthy, homemade meal. Eating together is a form of hospitality and helps strengthen people's relationships.

Blessings,
Chuck Shaffer MD

The Recipe of the Month

Spicy Paprika Rub

Ingredients

- 2 TBSP Paprika
- 2 TSP Onion powder
- 2 TSP Salt
- 1 TSP Dried garlic
- 1 TSP Cayenne pepper
- 1/2 TSP Black pepper

Directions

Simply apply before cooking meat, making sure to rub in the seasoning. Additionally, sprinkle on top to create a crispy, outer layer. Use 1 - t tbsp per pound of meat. Enjoy!



**Spicy, Smoky,
Mouthwatering.**