



October 10, 2018

# Wellness Wednesday

## Five Realistic Ways to Get the Most Out of Family Dinnertime

In many homes, dinnertime is the only time during the week that family members are in the same place at the same time and not frantically getting ready to head somewhere. That means how families spend that time together can be incredibly important.

SO, HOW CAN FAMILIES GET  
THE BEST VALUE OUT OF  
THIS TIME TOGETHER?



Lynn Barendsen is a project director at Harvard University's graduate school of education and the executive director of the school's [Family Dinner Project](#), an initiative that emphasizes the importance of families eating dinner together. Barendsen explained that there's been copious research showing regular family meals can lead to healthier eating habits, lower rates of depression and anxiety, higher self-esteem, better vocabularies and grades at school.

### Learn how to actually get the family talking.

After a long day, some people in the family, whether that's the kids or the caregivers, might not be enthusiastic about chatting about what happened at school or work or wherever else they spent their day. To get the conversation flowing, Brad Kennington, faculty member and director of professional relations at the Austin Family Institute in Texas, suggested leaving conversations that might spark conflict (like how messy one of the kids' rooms is, for example) for another time. The licensed marriage and family therapist said to instead ask specific questions about the kids' lives.

"If you know what's going on with your kids, you're invested, you're aware, you're present, you're showing up," he said. "Ask them movies they want to see, ask them about music or their favorite game and how it's different from their other games."

Matt Lundquist, a psychotherapist and the director of Tribeca Therapy in New York, suggested that if the kids don't seem willing to start up a conversation, it's just as important for them to see healthy communication between their parents, caregivers or other adult family members. "There's richness with the family coming together as a whole," he said. "Two parents are talking about their day, and kids are observing it. It's an opportunity to observe interactions."

Talia Wagner, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Los Angeles, recommended Table Topics, a company that sells question cards that serve as ice-breakers for family conversations and other events. The Family Dinner Project also offers talking-point ideas on its site and social-media pages.

## Pay attention to the details.

While chatting out loud can be fun and beneficial for families, Dr. Tammy Lewis Wilborn, who owns Wilborn Clinical Services and is a visiting assistant professor in the University of New Orleans' counseling department, noted that parents should pick up on nonverbal cues at the dinner table, too.

"This established time is a time where you're reading nonverbals, you're having conversations," she said. "You might be able to pick up on emotional changes or something that's different." Barendsen noted that minor details like having kids pick the music as the family cooks or cleans up can have a positive effect. Also, consider having themes for dinner for the cuisine or throwing in ideas like having breakfast for dinner.

## Take time to figure out how technology fits in your family's dinnertime.

Wagner joked that for many people cellphones are "just a natural extension of their hands now." And by simply putting down the phone or even putting it far away from the dinner space, you're sending a very clear message. "You put your phone down, and you're saying, 'This is important to me, you're important to me, what you want to share with me is important,'" she said. "On so many levels that elevates [kids'] self-worth and self-esteem."

That isn't to say technology can't be helpful during dinner. Mixing up the family event every so often to include a show can be a great way to then engage with kids about what parts stuck out to them and what roles were relatable to them. Barendsen suggested incorporating video chat to "eat" with family and friends far away or using a phone to look up the answer to an interesting question or find a funny video for the family to watch together.

## Be aware of how you talk about the food on the table.

Kennington also specializes in eating disorders, specifically how they affect boys and men. He stressed that it's crucial for parents to not criticize their bodies in front of their kids, a topic that is commonly brought up in subtle ways during a meal.

"If a parent is criticizing their body, their kid goes, 'Wow, that's my gene pool. Is that what I'm going to end up with?'" he said. "Or if they already resemble their parents in body type, they think, 'If my parents' bodies are wrong, then my body is wrong and I have to fix this.' He encouraged parents to change their vocabulary from designating foods as "good" and "bad" to describing them as "nutritious" and "recreational" and to promote balance in eating habits.

## Start out small, and don't be too hard on yourself.

Wilborn wants parents to remember that what works around the dinner table for one family might not work for another. Families come in many shapes, sizes and forms, so why would there be one end-all strategy to get the most out of family dinnertime? It's also important to note that not every family is in a position to have daily family time together like a sit-down dinner. In that case, make your family time the time that works best for you, whether that's breakfast, on the weekend, or another time.

"Be flexible with the family you actually have and don't try to model your family after another," she said. "Pick one thing to work on — the food, fun or conversation. Work on that until you're seeing some progress," she said. "Then choose something else to focus on, as a family."

# This Week's Exercise

## SQUAT TO CURL



### HOW TO DO IT:

1. PLACE THE BOSU BALL WITH THE RIGID BACK DOWN AND THE BALL-SIDE UP.
2. GRAB A SET OF DUMBBELLS AND STAND WITH BOTH FEET ON THE BALL-SIDE OF THE BOSU BALL.
3. STAND TALL WITH YOUR CHEST OUT, SHOULDERS BACK, AND DUMBBELLS AT YOUR SIDES.
4. WHEN YOU'VE GOT YOUR BALANCE, SLOWLY SQUAT DOWN, KEEPING THE DUMBBELLS AT YOUR SIDES.
5. PERFORM A DUMBBELL BICEP CURL AS YOU MOVE BACK UP TO STANDING, AND REPEAT FOR THE ALLOTTED TIME.

Source: <http://bit.ly/2ILTtoG>

*Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.*



## ZUCCHINI CHICKEN ENCHILADA ROLL UPS



### Ingredients

1 3/4 cups homemade enchilada sauce  
2 large (14 oz each) zucchini, cut lengthwise into 12 (1/4-inch thick)  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt  
fresh black pepper, to taste  
1 tsp olive oil  
8 ounces cooked shredded chicken breast (from rotisserie chicken)  
1/2 cup minced onion  
2 large clove garlic, minced  
1/4 cup chopped cilantro, plus more for garnish  
1 tsp cumin  
1/2 tsp dried oregano  
1/4 tsp chipotle chili powder  
3/4 cup shredded Mexican cheese blend  
sour cream, optional

*To cut the zucchini thin, try using a mandolin. Also, grilling zucchini strips on a grill or grill pan before rolling prevents soginess, and it also makes it easy to roll.*

### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400F. Spread 1/4 cup of the enchilada sauce on the bottom of a 13 x 9-inch baking dish.
2. Cut the zucchini lengthwise, into 1/4-inch thick slices until you have a total of 12 slices about the same size.
3. Season both sides of the zucchini with 1/2 tsp salt and pepper, then grill on a grill pan over high heat to help dry out the zucchini, until pliable and grill marks form, but not fully cooked, about 2 minutes on each side.
4. Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté onions and garlic on low until soft, about 2 minutes. Add chicken, salt, cilantro, cumin, oregano, chili powder, 1/4 cup of the enchilada sauce, and cook 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat.
5. Spread 3 tablespoons chicken on each slice zucchini. Roll up slices and arrange them each seam side down in the prepared dish.
6. Top with the remaining enchilada sauce and Mexican cheese blend and tightly cover with foil.
7. Bake 20 minutes, or until the cheese is hot and melted.
8. Drizzle with sour cream, if desired and garnish with cilantro.

### Nutrition Information

Yield: 4 servings  
Serving Size: 3 roll ups

Amount Per Serving:  
Freestyle Points: 5  
Points +: 6  
Calories: 225  
Total Fat: 8g  
Saturated Fat: 3g  
Cholesterol: 46.5mg  
Sodium: 947.5mg  
Carbohydrates: 19.5g  
Fiber: 5g  
Sugar: 7.5g  
Protein: 22g

Recipe source:  
<http://bit.ly/2lJQs8b>