Promoting Family Meals to Improve Children’s Dietary Intake and Weight Outcomes

Jess Haines, PhD, RD
Family Relations and Applied Nutrition

http://www.shipnewsnow.com
Overview

• Benefits and challenges of family meals

• How best to support family meals
  – What families are looking for
  – What programs/strategies exist
  – Guelph Family Health Study

• Implications and next steps
Family Meals

• Benefits of family meals?

http://ident-a-kid.blogspot.ca
Benefits of Family Meals

• More fruits and vegetables; lower sugar sweetened beverage intake
• Less likely to gain excess weight
• Less likely to smoke, drink, drugs
• Better grades
• Improved communication

http://www.healthyeating.org
Parents recognize these benefits

• Canadians identified family meals as a favourite time to interact and talk about their day (Turcotte, 2007)

• Parents identify opportunity for conversation and togetherness as key benefits of family meals (Fulkerson et al., 2008)
Family meals decreasing

• Steady decrease since 1966

• Number of American children reporting eating meals regularly with their families decreased from 89% in 1973 to 75% in 1994 (Nicklas et al., 2004)
More recent decline (Walton, under review)

Among 14-15 year olds family dinners/week decreased:
5.3 to 4.6 (p = 0.04) among males
5.0 to 4.4 (p = 0.03) among females
In Ontario

- 65% of students in grades 6-8 had family meals 6-7 days per week
- 20% 3-5 days per week
- 15% less than 2 days per week

Woodruff et al, 2009
Challenges to having family meals

- Time constraints
- Chaos – both with meal preparation and at the table
- Food pickiness of children
- Conflict during the meal
- Financial constraints

Bowen, Elliot, & Brenton, 2014; Fulkerson et al., 2008; Haines et al., in prep
What could help?

- Help with meal planning
- Quick, healthful, inexpensive meal ideas and recipes
- Help making mealtimes more pleasant
- Engage family in planning and food prep

Fulkerson et al., 2008; Haines et al., in preparation
Community Food Advisors (CFA)

- 13 CFA programs in ON
- Peer educators
  - Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating
  - Planning a menu
  - Handling food safely
  - Grocery shopping and budgeting
  - Food demos: preparing, cooking, storing, and preserving food
Meal planning support

- Health Canada

- Dietitians of Canada
  http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Plan-Shop-Cook.aspx

- EatRight Ontario
Family-based cohort study that aims to:

• Identify early life risk factors for obesity and chronic disease
• Test family-based strategies to promote healthy behaviours early in life
Interdisciplinary focus
Intervention: Builds on previous work

Haines et al., JAMA Pediatrics, 2013
Long-term goals

Recruit 3000 families and follow them for 20 years.

Aspirational goal: To become for family-based chronic disease prevention what the Framingham Heart Study is for the identification of heart disease risk factors.
But before we achieve all that, we started with a pilot study

- Pilot randomized control trial with 44 families
  - 79 parents (average age 36 years)
  - 56 children (average age 4 years)
- Diverse with regards to socioeconomic status and health behaviours
Study Design

Baseline Assessment

Randomize

Intervention
- client-centred
- tailored to family

Control
- general health info

6-month Follow up
Goal Sheet

- Eat more meals together as a family (TV off).
- Set a bedtime routine and get 11 hours of sleep.
- Choose water. Limit juice to 125 mL (1/2 cup) per day and no soda.
- Remove the TV from the room where your child sleeps.
- Make time to be physically active each day.
- Limit TV/screen time to 1-2 hours per day or less.
Intervention: family meals

• Review typical day
• Goal setting
• Counselling and email supports
• Family routine tracker
• Recipe index (in development)
Creating a family meal routine

• Any meal counts
• Set a realistic goal
• Can you shift work/activity schedules
• Keep it simple
• Enlist help from all family members

http://cackleberries.com/blog/
Making meals enjoyable

• Try to ensure your children come hungry
• Consider, but don’t cater to your children
• Turn off electronics
• Try to keep discussion light
So, does it work?

http://www.parents.org
Next steps and implications

• Association between food skills and frequency and quality of family meals

• Best practices to support families

• Ways to package, sell, market foods to support easy and healthy meal prep
Thank you. Questions?