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JANUARY 2007

Dear Colleagues:

Happy New Year! Welcome to the 9th year of ERM's award winning Healthy Families campaign – and the 1st issue of our 2007 campaign on ***Eating Together, Playing Together***. This month features a general introduction to the importance of family meals, along with handouts on easy ways to add more “**togetherness**” to food and fitness. Over the next year, we will delve into both the **whys** and the **how-tos** of eating and playing together – for more “traditional” families and for any group of people who choose to share mealtime and playtime activities.

Our 2007 theme is timely for two reasons. The first is an accumulating body of research showing that family-style meals are about much more than people eating at the same time. According to an article in the **April 2006 *Journal of the American Dietetic Association***, the family meal is “a potential public health measure for improving dietary quality, reducing overweight, and improving education and social outcomes.”

The second reason is all about emerging consumer trends in health and wellness. As outlined by The Hartman Group in their ***7 trends to watch in 2007***, consumers are looking for **simplicity** and **vitality**, as well as new definitions of **quality**. As we explore more effective ways to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the next year, we promise to weave all three trends into our messages and materials.

For details on The Hartman Group's 2007 health trend predictions, visit www.hartman-group.com/products/HB/2006_12_13.html. For more on the benefits of family meals, visit the National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University www.casafamilyday.org/

Healthy Families packets are made possible with the generous support of agencies, organizations, and individuals. Please join us in thanking the 2006 sponsors listed on the left. If you utilize this information and can make a donation to support positive, practical messages for families, please contact ERM Chair Katie Bark at 406-994-5641 or kbark@mt.gov

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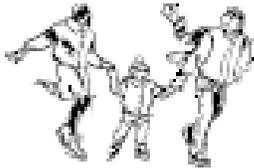
Rebekah Brown 406-994-2926 Crystelle Fogle 406-947-2344
Katie Bark 406-994-5641

Physical Activity

Five Easy Ways to Spend More Time Playing Together

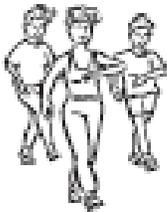
★ Plan time to PLAY OUTSIDE together.

A family that plays together stays healthy together. **Give each person a chance to choose an outdoor activity for everybody to play together.** Depending on the weather, you could throw a Frisbee, fly a kite, build a snowman, or go up and down the slide at the park. You might also be able to play tag, pick up a game of basketball, or draw an old-fashioned game of hopscotch on the sidewalk.



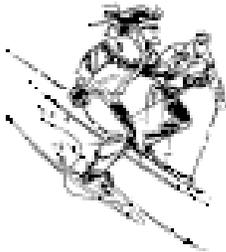
★ Plan to TAKE A WALK together.

Walking can easily become a game rather than an exercise. **You can always take a dog. They love to play with balls and sticks.** Children of all ages can really get into a silly game of *Simon Says*: Walk with your hands on your head or behind your back. Swing your arms like a chimpanzee or an elephant's trunk. Prance along on your tippy toes, twirl in circles, or just skip along together.



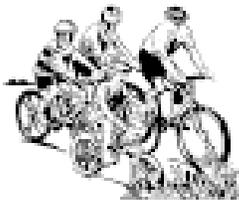
★ Plan time to PLAY INSIDE together.

Being active indoors can be lots of fun too. Clear some space for playing with soft *Nerf*® or *Koosh*® balls. Get all tied up a game of *Twister*® – or get hooked on one of the active video games, like *Dance Dance Revolution*®. Kids love to move their bodies in almost any imaginable way. You can have lots of fun just crawling around like wild animals or with a game of indoor hide-and-seek.



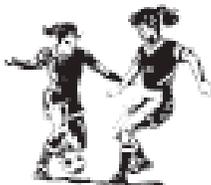
★ Plan to DANCE together.

Dancing is the perfect family activity – a delightful combination of movement for your body, music for your ears, and joy for your heart. Indoors or outdoors, there's no need to follow any specific rules or steps. **All you need is music and a little bit of space.** Children love to learn new moves from videos – or just to make up their own creative routines as the music moves them.



★ Plan to TAKE A CLASS together.

Want to learn some new skills and play together at the same time? Check out the classes at your local YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, dance studio, or fitness center. **Many now offer instruction – and fun – for the whole family together.** If you're not able to make a long-term commitment, ask about family fun nights in the gym – or splash-and-play events in the pool.



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

a coalition representing health, nutrition and active lifestyles

Healthy Eating

Five Easy Ways to Enjoy More Mealtimes Together

1. Plan ONE MORE family mealtime in every week.

Take a quick inventory of how many times you usually eat together now. **Then plan to add just one more family mealtime per week.** If dinnertime is too hectic, add a leisurely weekend breakfast or lunch. After a month or two of this new pattern, you can then add another family meal each week – until, before you know it, you are enjoying eating together at least five times every week.

2. Plan TASTY MENUS for family meals together.

If you think that putting a meal together has to be complicated or time-consuming, think again! **The best meals are simple, delicious, and planned together.** Let everyone choose a favorite menu for one day. Even small children can pick a main dish (like tacos or pasta), a veggie (green salad or cooked carrots) and fruit for dessert (sliced apples or canned peaches in juice).

3. Plan to set a SPECIAL TABLE for family meals.

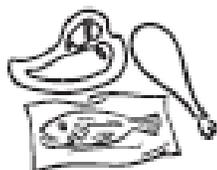
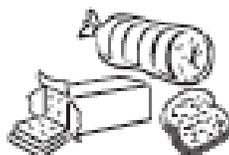
Food is just one important part of mealtime. There are many other ways to set the mood for an enjoyable and relaxed time around the table together. A little extra attention to the actual table setting (with very little expense) can add a lot to mealtime atmosphere. **Some inexpensive possibilities include: a candle, some colored napkins, or wipe-clean, plastic tablemats for children.**

4. Plan to ENJOY CONVERSATION at the table.

Many mealtime benefits come from the conversations that families have while eating together. Children learn new words from the adults – and adults are able to share family values with the next generation. **Choose topics that are positive and allow everyone to participate.** Even toddlers like to offer their opinions on topics like “*what is your favorite color*” or “*what made you laugh today*.”

5. Plan to TURN OFF THE TV and telephones.

Loud television noise and multiple phone calls can upset anyone’s mealtime routine – making it difficult to eat or carry on a conversation. The solution is simple: Declare mealtime a TV and phone-free zone (except for emergencies, of course). **Turn off the distractions for just 30 minutes.** Imagine you are dining at a nice restaurant and play some soothing background music at low volume.





FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: Crystelle Fogle, MBA, RD 406.947.2344
MT Department of Public Health & Human Services

EATING TOGETHER, PLAYING TOGETHER
Celebrating Healthy Families 2007

January 1, 2007

A New Kind of Resolution for Health and Happiness

Like many Montanans, your thoughts are probably already on some sort of New Year's resolution. You may have already signed up for a gym membership or diet program – with sincere intentions to “stick with it” this year. However, if you are really serious about health and well-being, you may want to consider a much simpler resolution for the whole family.

“Sometimes a seemingly simple act can have a profound impact on overall health, “ says Katie Bark, RD (registered dietitian) with the Team Nutrition Program at Montana State University in Bozeman. “Simply eating more meals together can improve physical, mental, and emotional health for your whole family.”

Studies show that family meals can have a positive affect on nutrition. Eating more family meals is associated with the same smart food choices that promote a healthy weight: higher intake of fruits, vegetables, grains, and calcium-rich foods, as well as lower soft drink intake. Teens who eat more family meals have higher intakes of key nutrients like calcium, iron, vitamins A, C, E, B₆, and folate, as well as fiber.

According to Bark, family meals are about more than eating healthy food together. They increase intergenerational communication and a sense of family unity, which affects many aspects of a young person's life – from substance abuse to performance in school. ***The Importance of Family Dinners III*** 2006 survey by the National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University showed just how important family meals can be.

The report revealed that young people who ate dinner with their family 5 or more times per week were much likelier to say that they receive either all A's or mostly A's and B's in school. Teens who had family dinners less than 2 times per week were more than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes – and one and a half times likelier to have tried alcohol.

“Making a commitment to regular family meals – with a variety of nutrient-rich foods served in a pleasant atmosphere – is clearly one of the simplest ways to enhance your family's health and happiness,” says Bark, mother of two college-age daughters. Here are five of her favorite tips for creating quality mealtimes even with hectic schedules:

- Make family meals a top priority by writing them into everyone's calendar or PDA.
- Plan ahead by creating simple meals and shopping for ingredients on the weekend.
- Share the responsibility by letting every family member choose the menu for one night.
- Set a special table by simply adding a candle or some colored napkins.
- Treasure the time together by turning off TVs and telephones for the entire mealtime.