



April 1, 2003

Dear Colleague:

These are anxious times for our nation and our state. War in Iraq, worries about global terrorism, the state budget crisis and a multi-year drought are constantly in the news – and on our minds. During troubled times, the health and strength of our families is more important than ever – and more dependent on simple pleasures, like eating a meal together, taking a walk together or reading a book together.

Our April **Eat Right Montana** packet focuses on the importance of togetherness, as we continue our 2003 theme of **Fit and Healthy, Anytime, Anywhere**. We discuss **eating dinner together** and **playing together for fun and fitness**. We also offer some thoughts on **Slow Food**, the international movement focused on **enjoyment!**

Family meals may be much more than a safe haven during stressful times. Research shows a long list of health, education and other benefits. Family meals may indeed be a “secret weapon” in our efforts to promote healthy weights and fitness for all Americans, especially children. Here are a few places to learn more:

- **Eat Better, Eat Together Tool Kit:** Ideas for Promoting Positive Family Meals <http://nutrition.wsu.edu/eat/toolkit.html> This comprehensive resource from Washington State Cooperative Extension and Nutrition Education Network is a fabulous blend of background research, great ideas and practical tools.
- **How do YOU do dinner?** (from the Montana State University Extension) <http://www.montana.edu/extensionnutrition/dinner/projectinfo.htm> Go here for multiple ways “to pull off dinner” for taxi moms, single parents, college couples and families with young children. Easy, quick and yummy!!
- **Say YES to Family Meals** (from Iowa State University Extension) <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1842.pdf> Check out this four-page newsletter for a quick summary of the benefits of family meals, along with an easy recipe for pleasant family mealtimes (like conversation cards!).

As always, we welcome feedback ~ so, please let us know what you think.

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**Fit and Healthy, Anytime, Anywhere: Solutions for busy families**  
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**Healthy Families 2003: Eating together, playing together (4<sup>th</sup> in a series of 12)**

These are stressful times for many families – with war, budget woes and job layoffs reported in every newscast. When stress hits home, we often let our health slide into the background. We may stay glued to the TV – and grab fast foods and snacks rather than preparing high-energy meals.

“Eating well and being active are more important now than ever,” says Phyllis Dennee, MS, of Montana State University Extension in Bozeman. “Nutrient-dense foods and physical activity are the best defense when it comes to fighting stress, disease and everyday illnesses, like colds and flu.”

If you’re looking for easy ways to reduce stress, stay healthy and feel better, the answer may be as close as your dinner table. Research shows that family meals lead to better nutrition, better language skills, better school performance and better overall adjustment in children and teens.

According to Dennee, quick and healthy family dinners are simpler than you think. “Whether you are a taxi mom, single parent, college couple or a big family, it’s easy and inexpensive to put a tasty meal on the table. Best of all, with minimal effort you can get rave reviews with easy tips like these.”

● **Cook once, eat twice:** With double batches and “planned-overs,” you can create your own frozen dinners and microwave meals – more nutrition for much less money.

● **Plan, plan, plan:** Get everyone involved in contributing their favorite recipes and menus – or take it easy with complete weekly menus from [www.montana.edu/extensionnutrition/dinner/](http://www.montana.edu/extensionnutrition/dinner/).

Eat Right Montana (ERM), a statewide coalition promoting healthful eating and active lifestyles, urges all Montana families to spend more time eating and playing together. Just adding one more family dinner to your weekly schedule can have big payoffs for your family’s health and, maybe even, finances.

“Renew your commitment to healthy habits,” says Dennee. “Whether you’re on a battlefield and caring for a family at home, nutrition and fitness are the keys to staying strong and healthy.”

**ATTACHED: *Eating Together and Playing Together ~ for health and fitness***

# Eating Together for Health and Fitness

Sometimes very simple changes can make a big difference. Increasing the meals that your family eats together can make a big difference in your health, happiness and even your finances. No time to make a meal? No problem, family dinners are easier than you think.

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## WHY eat together as a family?

- ❶ Families save time, money and hassle.
- ❷ Children learn skills, values and traditions.
- ❸ Children have fewer behavior problems.
- ❹ Children do better in school and on tests.
- ❺ Children and adults get the nutrients they need.
- ❻ Everyone treasures mealtime memories.

## HOW can YOU do dinner quickly and easily?

- ❶ **Plan a weekly menu:** Make it simple or make it detailed. The key is to have a plan for shopping and cooking. Involve the whole family – less stress for any one person.
- ❷ **Cook once, eat twice:** Cut down dramatically on your prep time. Cook and freeze larger batches of key ingredients, like ground beef for tacos and spaghetti sauce.
- ❸ **Keep the cupboard stocked:** Pack your pantry (and freezer) with staples like canned beans, tuna and fruit; pasta, rice and baking mixes; and frozen vegetables.
- ❹ **Use the sandwich advantage:** Nothing is quicker than a sandwich – breakfast (toaster waffles), lunch (whole grain bread) or dinner (pita pocket or tortilla wrap).

## WHAT foods make the perfect family dinner?

- ❶ **Grains:** High-energy carbohydrates, especially whole grains, have a place on every dinner table. A bread machine (with a timer) can serve it up hot – right on schedule.
- ❷ **Meat, fish, poultry, and beans:** High-quality proteins provide “muscle” for healthy meals. Do a combo, like beef and beans in chili for an extra fiber boost!
- ❸ **Vegetables and fruit:** Any meal is perfect for produce. Pack one-third to one-half of your plate with a colorful bonanza of fresh, frozen or canned fruits and veggies.
- ❹ **Dairy:** A glass of cold, refreshing milk (1% or less) is the beverage of choice for healthy families. Cheese, cottage cheese and yogurt are other tasty calcium sources.



**Celebrating  
Healthy  
Families 2003**

## Playing Together for Health and Fitness

Being active is one of the best (and easiest) ways for American families to spend time together. With a small investment in time (and maybe a little equipment), your family can enjoy a long list of physical and emotional benefits. What is your family waiting for?

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### WHY play together as a family?

- ✓ A family that plays together, stays together.
- ✓ Regular fun activities lead to physical fitness.
- ✓ Children who are physically fit do better in school.
- ✓ Being active helps maintain a healthy weight.
- ✓ Active play is good for kids – and their parents too!

### WHAT activities work best for families?

Kids need 30 to 60 minutes of daily activity for optimal health. P.E. classes and athletics count. So do sports like Little League and soccer, swim classes and family activities.

- ✓ **Aerobic activities:** Walk the dog. Bike to the store. Swing at the park. Dance down the sidewalk. Slide at the playground. Fun, fun, fun for everyone!
- ✓ **Helping activities:** Kids like to help and “chores” can be fun with the right attitude. Sweep the floor to music. See how quickly you can clean up the yard.
- ✓ **Fun activities:** Focus on the fun – and nobody will feel like they are doing exercise. Kite flying? Chasing bubbles in the wind? Splashing in a pool?

### HOW can we fit fitness into a busy schedule?

- ✓ **Walk to and from school:** If you live near school, start walking, biking, or riding a scooter as often as you can. Go both ways – or just one way. After school, spend time at the playground or stop at the park for a game of folf (Frisbee golf) or baseball.
- ✓ **Create a fun zone at home:** Turn off the TVs, computers and video games. Make a place to play inside (clear a piece of carpet to toss foam balls or dance) and outside (flower or veggie gardens, basketball hoops or an old fashioned tree house).
- ✓ **Join a club:** Sometimes it is safer or warmer to play indoors. Check out the options in your area. Some health clubs and gyms have fun family programs. Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA/YWCAs often provide free (or low cost) family memberships.



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# Slowing Down to Eat (and Feel) Better

Slow Food is an international movement that started in Italy in the 1980's. It promotes some very important concepts about "how" to eat – like the "protection of the right to taste" and the belief that meals are meant to be enjoyed rather than simply swallowed. Here are some easy, and healthful ways, to slow down and eat better.

## 🍷 Eat when you are sitting at a table.

It's hard to feel satisfied when you shovel in a bowl of ice cream while standing in front of the fridge. Or scarf a burger and fries while driving down the highway. It's also easy to eat more than your body wants. Eating while sitting at the table allows you to focus on the food in front of you – for both pleasure and nutritional value.

## 🍷 Prepare more meals for your family.

Home cooked meals are generally lower in cost and higher in nutrients – and you control the portion size. Think you have no time to cook? Just switch a few minutes of your evening TV time to "assembling" a meal from healthy convenience foods, like whole wheat rolls, microwave chicken breast, frozen veggies and salad-in-a-bag.

## 🍷 Eat when you are hungry.

This is a tough one – since we are surrounded 24/7 by tempting foods and the ads that tempt us to buy them. It is a very important concept, however, because when we eat in the absence of hunger, we tend to eat guiltily and quickly. This usually means high-sugar, high-fat snack foods – in larger amounts than we might otherwise eat.

## 🍷 Savor whatever you are eating.

Taste is the number one reason why we eat. When we eat quickly, there is no time for our taste buds (and sense of smell) to get maximum flavors and pleasure from food. By eating slowly and paying attention, we get greater satisfaction from all meals and snacks. And, remember, it takes 20 minutes for your brain to "hear" that you are full!

## 🍷 Eat only what you really enjoy.

Although this may seem obvious, it really isn't. We often eat something just because "it's there." Ever eat the last fruit-filled chocolates in the box, when all your favorites were gone? Or how about the last cookie on the tray, even when you don't really like raisins or oatmeal? Eating food you don't like is a waste of calories – and enjoyment!

## 🍷 Take a stroll before, or after, a meal.

When it comes to health and fitness, nutrition and physical activity go hand-in-hand. Physical activity helps your appetite and hunger signals operate normally. It's really all about healthy self-care: If you move your body regularly, you'll also want to fuel yourself healthfully – instead of eating willy-nilly whatever happens to be available.

For more information about the Slow Food philosophy and activities visit:

🍷 Slow Food USA® at: <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>

🍷 Slow Food International® at: <http://www.slowfood.com/>

Provided by Eat Right Montana

# Healthy Families 2003

## Fit and Healthy, Anytime, Anywhere: Taking charge of your eating and your life

### January 2003

- Nutrition and Physical Activity, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE!!

### February 2003

- Healthy options in the morning

### March 2003

- Healthy options at noon

### April 2003

- Healthy options in the evening

### May 2003

- Healthy options between meals

### June 2003

- Healthy options at work

### July 2003

- Healthy options on the road

### August 2003

- Healthy options while camping

### September 2003

- Healthy options at school

### October 2003

- Healthy options for hunting

### November 2003

- Healthy options in restaurants

### December 2003

- Healthy options at celebrations

