

# Eating Well - Home Activities

## Meal Time Activities

### Blessings

Use mealtime prayers as a way of teaching your children to recognize that God is the creator and sustainer of life. Prayers can be ones you write as a family, a traditional favorite, a spontaneous one, or a song. Mealtime prayers provide an opportunity for children to practice praying publicly. Try rotating the leadership role. Don't hesitate to pray when guests are present, rather welcome them into your family's rituals.

### Home Alone

Pick a regular night once a week when everyone will be present for dinner with no guests invited. This means making a family commitment to not working late, attending meetings or after school activities. Make sure everyone has a task to perform in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning.

### Centerpieces

Create table centerpieces. They can be made of anything such as flowers, an arrangement of small toys or dolls, or an art project. If possible, create them together from family activities such as nature walks.

### Weekend Cook-off

Can't get together for supper? Create a Saturday or Sunday morning cook-off. Prepare a full meal (such as a casserole, muffins, and dessert) or a couple of main dishes to be eaten later in the day and/or week. Select recipes and ingredients in advance. Make sure everyone has a task in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning. Consider ending with a brief blessing of the food. That spaghetti sauce eaten alone after soccer practice will taste "better" if its prepared at the Cook-off.

### Weekly Rituals

Whether its Friday Pizza Night or Tuesday Sundaes, they're fun to look forward to! One family we know, short on preparation time and cooking skill, uses restaurants as a regular place to catch up on each other's lives.

### Feed the Hungry

If food is important to your family, then you can understand the feelings of those who go hungry. Many of us participate in programs to feed the hungry during the holidays, thus it is especially important to support these programs in the "off season". Many churches offer opportunities for families to help prepare and serve a meal at a local meal program. How about at your next family get-together asking families to bring canned goods for each member of their family? Later take the food to a local food bank or shelter. Another suggestion is to make a simple supper, eliminate dessert or those Sunday donuts, and as a family determine a local charity to donate the money.

### The Ritual of Lighting Candles

The ritual of lighting candles is more than a means of decoration. Candles speak of warmth, love, and celebration. They can be a powerful sign of the presence of God in times of trouble, suffering as well as times of celebration. They can also be lighted at a time of great joy, distress,

or out of need for another. Candles also can be representative of family members who are away from home.

Before, during or after an evening meal, hold a family candle-lighting ceremony to symbolize that Christ is the Light of the World and also its hope. Read Isaiah 60:19-20 and John 1:14. Invite each family member to light his or her candle and pray the following prayer:

### **Candle Prayer for a Dinner Celebration**

May the warmth of fire and light  
that radiates from these candles  
reflect its glow on all who sit at this table,  
blessing this meal and our conversation.  
May the memory of this gathering linger  
long after these candles have been extinguished.

### **Baking Day**

Consider making Saturday morning a baking day. Pull out your cookbooks and browse through to find something exciting you'd like to make together. Decide on a particular recipe, get out the aprons and have fun! At mealtime, enjoy telling your stories about the activity and make a big decision together: does the recipe go or stay?

### **Meal-time Litany**

At mealtime, at the end of the blessing, our family would always say, "God bless Mom and Dad and Pat and individually name each person in the family. It eventually developed into a blessing for others -- for anyone whom a family member wanted to remember, such as a friend at school who was having a hard time, or maybe someone who had a death in the family. Now we have grandchildren. When they come to the house, they like to include their little friends from kindergarten. It has been very rewarding. Our married children are continuing this ritual in their families.

### **Ethnic Night**

Every family has favorite foods that it enjoys together. It may be as simple as an evening bowl of popcorn or as unpredictable as homemade ice cream. Cooking together is also a great family activity, especially if you're working to produce one of your specialties. You are not simply producing the food which disappears in minutes; you are also creating memories that last a lifetime.

It is always a valuable experience to learn about other cultures. Sometimes the simple act of having a different kind of food can lead toward appreciation of another people's ways.

**Make It Yourself.** Get the whole family involved in shopping and preparing food you've never cooked yourself. Most big cities have ethnic grocery stores. Visit one with the family and ask the proprietor for dinner suggestions. It can be educational to tour the aisles of these grocery stores.

**Decorate.** It adds to the experience to use as many cultural trappings as you are able. For example, when eating a Chinese dinner, use chopsticks. You may also want to use a wok to prepare foods. On Mexican night, hang a pinata over the table. If you don't have time to make a traditional one, try decorating a large paper bag using markers. Fill the bag with candy. Tie it at the top with a string. Suspend the bag from a broomstick or hand it in a doorway. Blindfold children and let them take turns trying to break it with a plastic baseball bat. Make your own placemats and allow it to become a family project.