As kids get older, they tend to eat fewer meals with their families. But there are plenty of good reasons to try to keep them at the table. Family meals lead to better grades, healthier eating, and less chance of risky behavior. Consider ideas like these to make dinnertime something your tween or teen looks forward to.

- **Set a goal.** With your whole family, decide on a goal, such as three meals together a week. Those days don’t have to be the same week to week, nor does dinner have to be at the same time each day. Work with everyone’s schedules to meet your goal.

- **Appoint a chef.** Once a week (or more), have your teen cook the meal. She’ll certainly want to eat a meal she worked hard to prepare! Also, meal planning can be a great bonding experience. Go online with her to find recipes, and shop together for the ingredients.

- **Create a mood.** Let your tween put together a soundtrack for your meal. Or take turns letting family members pick out background music for each meal. Every now and then, make meals special by lighting candles or using the “company” napkins or plates.

- **Keep dinners pleasant.** Use dinnertime to catch up on everyone’s day or to share amusing stories. Save conversations about low grades or missed curfews for another time. **Tip:** Leave cell phones and handheld video games in another room so you can focus on each other.

**Finding your target heart rate**

How will your child know if he’s exercising his heart hard enough to help it stay healthy? By checking his heart rate. Share these steps.

1. Subtract your age from 220 to estimate your maximum heart rate (the most your heart should beat per minute). **Example:** For a 16-year-old, 220 – 16 = 204 maximum heart rate.

2. Compute 50 to 85 percent of that maximum to get your target range (102–173 for the 16-year-old). A newly active teen might aim for 50 percent, while an athlete can shoot for the higher side.

3. During exercise, check your rate by placing two fingers (palm-side down) on your wrist. Count the heartbeats for 15 seconds, and multiply by 4 for the total per minute.
Curb late-night snacking

Eating an occasional late-night snack is fine. But constantly reaching for food until bedtime can become a bad habit. Here are suggestions to keep that from happening.

Eat in the kitchen

Your child may have more snacks because he’s on the computer, watching TV, or playing video games—and eating “mindlessly.” Consider allowing food only in the kitchen. Then, if he’s truly hungry, he’ll have to go there to eat.

Play Olympic games

Celebrate the Winter Olympics with these fun games for family or friends.

Sock speed-skating. Wearing a thick pair of socks, each player takes turns going in circles on a smooth surface, like your kitchen floor. The winner is the player who completes the most laps in two minutes.

Sport charades. On separate index cards, write the names of Winter Olympics sports (go to olympic.org/sports for a list). Then, draw a card and act out the sport—no talking allowed. The first to guess it correctly goes next.

Idea: Encourage your tween or teen to try a real Winter Olympics sport, too. She might ice skate at a local rink, go skiing, or sled down a hill and pretend she’s on a bobsled.

In the Kitchen

Homemade granola bars

Instead of buying granola bars at the store, make these homemade versions with your child. She can choose extra mix-ins like dried fruit, nuts, and seeds to make them her own.

Cinnamon-peanut butter

Combine 4 cups oats, ½ cup chopped unsalted peanuts, ½ tsp. cinnamon, and ½ cup honey. Stir in ½ cup melted peanut butter. (Note: Melt peanut butter over low heat or in a microwave.) Press dough into a greased 9” x 13” pan. Bake 20–25 minutes at 350º. Cool, and slice into bars.

Try something soothing

Maybe your teenager is eating as a way to relax before bedtime. He might have Greek yogurt or a cup of hot (low-sodium) soup. Or a warm drink like decaf herbal tea may be enough to satisfy him.

Pack snack bags

For those times when your teen really is hungry before bed, keep healthy options handy. Ahead of time, he could make snack bags with small containers of salsa and cut-up cauliflower, or turkey slices rolled around light string cheese, for example.

Q & A

Q: My son’s drama club has a tradition of going out for ice cream sundaes after every performance—and there are several shows a weekend! Is there a way to celebrate without so many sweets?

A: Getting together after the show gives your son and his friends a chance to unwind and enjoy their success. The trick is to think of other places they would be happy going to. You could tell your son it might be fun to switch things up and save the ice cream party for the final performance.

For instance, after a matinee show, they could meet at a park. For evening performances, they might find a coffeehouse with live music and get hot chocolate or skin decaf lattes.

Or consider inviting them to your house for board games or a karaoke sing-along—and healthy snacks like popcorn and cut-up fruit. You might even coordinate with the other parents and take turns hosting the get-togethers.

Healthier celebrations

Q: My son’s drama club has a tradition of going out for ice cream sundaes after every performance—and there are several shows a weekend! Is there a way to celebrate without so many sweets?

A: Getting together after the show gives your son and his friends a chance to unwind and enjoy their success. The trick is to think of other places they would be happy going to. You could tell your son it might be fun to switch things up and save the ice cream party for the final performance.

For instance, after a matinee show, they could meet at a park. For evening performances, they might find a coffeehouse with live music and get hot chocolate or skin decaf lattes.

Or consider inviting them to your house for board games or a karaoke sing-along—and healthy snacks like popcorn and cut-up fruit. You might even coordinate with the other parents and take turns hosting the get-togethers.

ACTIVITY CORNER

No-bake cereal bars

Over medium-high heat, bring 1–2 cup brown sugar and 1–2 cup honey to a boil. Remove from heat. Add 1–2 cup almond butter. Mix in 2 cups each oats and whole-grain cereal. Transfer batter to a 9” x 13” pan (coated lightly with nonfat spray). Cut into bars when cool.