Television and family dinners

Many families eat their meals together in front of the television set. Instead of sharing the highs and lows of the day, learning more about each other or simply enjoying the comfort of being together with loved ones, they turn their attention away from family and to whatever is on the screen. The consequences are serious:

✦ When families tune in to TV instead of each other, they miss opportunities to connect. Regular table talk helps parents and children understand each other, making it easier to talk through tough issues when they arise. Playful exchanges, witnessing good listening, offering one another support – all this is lost when the TV is on during dinner.

✦ People who watch TV while eating tend to eat mindlessly, unaware of the flavor, color and texture their food and, more importantly, how much they consume. Because they miss their bodies’ cues to stop eating, they don’t know when they’ve had enough.

✦ Research suggests that children who eat dinner with their parents tend to eat more healthfully – consuming less saturated fat and more valuable nutrients than their unsupervised peers. Their food choices deteriorate when they eat in front of the TV.

If you want to break the dinner/television habit, you can begin by turning off the TV one night a week. When everyone is seated, express gratitude for the food before you. Offer pleasant stories about your day. Listen as others speak. Make that TV-free dinner the highlight of the day . . . soon it will be everyone’s favorite meal of the week.

October Is Eat Together, Eat Better Month.

Prayer: Dear God, as I gather my family together for an evening meal, help us nourish each other’s hearts and souls as we feast on good food that you provide. Amen.

Mealtime when you live alone

There is a big difference between dining and eating, and for those who live alone, that difference is felt every day. Most people who live alone turn on the television for company and make their meal presentation as simple as possible, but it doesn’t have to be that way.

Here are some ideas to make mealtime more pleasurable for those who live alone:

✦ If you eat your meals alone at home, treat yourself to a special solo dining experience and learn to enjoy the solitude. Prepare a wonderful meal, play your favorite music, set a beautiful table and use your loveliest dishes. Daniel Halpern, in the book How to Eat Alone, talks about the smells and anticipation that we can experience even when our table is set for just one: “Raise your glass in honor of yourself. The company is the best you’ll ever have.”

✦ When eating in a restaurant, avoid the inclination to hide in a corner or bury your head in a book. Ask to be seated in the front where you can see and be seen. Then you can enjoy the show as well as the meal!

✦ If you live in an apartment and wish to enjoy more meals with others, get creative! Bring dessert to a neighbor; it’s less of a commitment than an entire meal and a nice way to get to know someone. Or organize a tasting party in which each participant puts a t.v. tray outside his door with sample sizes of a favorite food. Then for one hour, neighbors sample each others favorites while chatting in the hall.

Even for a party of one, food can be exciting and enjoyable. Make each of your dining experiences the very best possible.

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