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## Amplifying Life

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### Dining In for Healthy Families

The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) has created Family and Consumer Science (FCS) Day as a way to promote family and consumer science programs, tools and professionals that support family meal time. This day is celebrated on December 3<sup>rd</sup> in honor of their Founder Ellen Swallow Richards. Ellen was the first woman to graduate from MIT and paved the way in educating women about home economics; December 3<sup>rd</sup> was her birthday. FCS Day is celebrated by "Dining In" for Healthy Families.

There is a nationwide obesity epidemic, especially in children and teens. Much of this has to do with unhealthy eating and lack of food preparation. Research has shown that the whole family benefits from family mealtime by having better nutrition, improving family communication, fostering family traditions, and teaching life skills such as meal planning, budgeting and food preparation. As part of FCS day families are encouraged to prepare simple, healthy meals and eat together. This supports the essence of Family and Consumer Sciences: "Creating Healthy and Sustainable Families." This year, there is a special focus on dining "device free" to build healthy relationships.

Family meals are a chance to put healthy food on the table. Beyond preparing the meal, the mealtime is a chance to talk, listen, and build family relationships. This means eating at a dining table as a chance for conversation instead of on the go or in front of the TV.

Lives are busy and sometimes meals together are hard to fit in the schedule. Angela Ginn, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, offers the following ideas to add more family meals into the family routine:

- Start slowly. Add a family dinner during the week or a weekend breakfast or lunch to the schedule; after a few weeks try adding another.
- Plan tasty menus together. Planning doesn't have to be complicated; let members of the family choose simple favorites to build the menu. Planning weekly menus help the meals for the week run smoothly.
- Set the right mood. Improve the tablesetting with colored napkins, a simple candle or wipe-clean placemats for young children.
- Talk. Family conversations at the table have a huge impact, as you share experiences, ideas, and pass along family values. Pick topics that are positive and

allow everyone to talk. You can create a conversation jar to come up with meal time topics.

-Turn off the TV, phones, and anything else that makes noise. They create a distraction. Declare the table a device free zone, except for emergencies of course.

No matter the age, there are many resources available on eating healthy. There are many nutritional advantages to eating at home. There are multiple ways to improve nutrition without giving up great meals, great flavor, and great family time. Plan to "Dine In" with your family on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. If life is too busy that day, set a date for later in the week!

For more information on tips for healthy eating or family dining, feel free to contact me. Shandi Andres, Flint Hills Extension District, 501 W Main, Council Grove, KS 66846. (620) 767-5136 or [sdandres@ksu.edu](mailto:sdandres@ksu.edu)