

# Dinners make a Difference



Whether you're sitting down to a macaroni and cheese dinner or a three-course meal, the simple act of eating dinner with your kids has a powerful impact on the whole family.

Almost two decades of research by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University has consistently found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs.

Studies show that kids who have family dinner five times a week are:

- 45 percent less likely to drink and 66 percent less likely to do drugs.
- More likely to get A's and B's in school.
- More likely to think their parents are proud of them.
- The power of the family dinner comes not from the food on the plate but from who's at the table and what's happening there. The emotional and social benefits that come from family dinners are priceless," said Kathleen Ferrigno, CASA's Director of Marketing and head of CASA Family Day — A Day to Eat Dinner with your Children.

"Having dinner as a family is one of the easiest ways to create routine opportunities for parental engagement and communication, two keys to raising drug-free children."

Even with busy schedules, it's easier than you think to have a regular family meal. Here are some tips from CASA and Stouffer's:

- Plan meals together.
- Make a date — schedule it on the calendar.
- Cook together.
- Unplug during dinner and talk.

Save time making dinner with family-friendly entrees such as Stouffer's Easy Express Cheesy Garlic Lasagna. This dish of freshly made pasta layered between mozzarella cheese, seasoned beef and a rich garlic tomato sauce is ready in only 18 minutes. While it's cooking, make a Creamy Parmesan Romaine salad and a simple Fruit Salad for a delicious dinner the whole family will enjoy.

Remember, dinner makes a difference, so be sure to take your seat at the dinner table often. For more tips on raising drug-free kids and creative ideas for family dinners, visit these websites: [www.letsfixdinner.com](http://www.letsfixdinner.com) and [www.casafamilyday.org](http://www.casafamilyday.org).

Family Features



## CONVERSATION STARTERS

Looking for a way to engage in conversations with your kids? Use these conversation starters for a fun way to get everyone talking.

- Where would you go for a dream vacation?
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
- What is one thing you could absolutely not live without?
- If you could live in any time period, which one would it be?
- What is your favorite thing you learned today?
- What is one thing you want to accomplish in your lifetime?
- What book are you reading right now? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?

## MIX IT UP WITH JENNY

### Time Saving Suppers For After School

**JENNY HARPER**  
Nestlé Test Kitchens

When school starts back up again, so do the busy schedules! Between school activities, sports, dance classes and music lessons, it can seem like there's never any time to sit down and eat a family meal, much less cook one.

But I've found a few tricks to help conquer the chaos so that we can gather around the table and have good food as well as good family time.

- Have a Plan. Make a weekly menu so you know how to answer the "I'm starved — what's for dinner?" question every night. This simplifies your shopping, too.
- Use Your Freezer. Cut down on your cooking time by making large-batch meals, then freezing some for future dinners. Thaw meals in the refrigerator overnight so when it's time to start cooking, all you have to do is pop one in the oven.
- Plan for Plan B. Let's face it — even the best laid plans can get derailed. But if you keep your pantry stocked with simple ingredients, you'll be able to throw a meal together in no time — like the delicious "Wheely" Easy Mac & Cheesy recipe here. Plan B items to keep on hand: pasta, diced

tomatoes, broth, rice, canned or frozen vegetables, evaporated milk and beans.

For more time-saving recipes, visit [www.VeryBestBaking.com](http://www.VeryBestBaking.com).

#### "WHEELY" EASY MAC & CHEESY

YIELD: 4 SERVINGS  
2 cups (8 ounces) dry wagon wheel or rotelle pasta  
1 cup frozen shelled edamame (shelled soybeans)  
1 can (12 fluid ounces) Nestlé Carnation Evaporated Milk  
2 cups (8-ounce package) shredded Monterey Jack and cheddar cheese blend or other cheese blend

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper  
1/2 cup cherry or grape tomatoes, cut in half

COOK pasta according to package directions, adding edamame to boiling pasta water for last 2 minutes of cooking time; drain.

MEANWHILE, COMBINE evaporated milk, cheese, garlic powder and black pepper in medium saucepan. Cook over medium low heat, stirring occasionally, until cheese is melted. Remove from heat.

ADD pasta and edamame to cheese sauce; stir until combined. Add tomatoes; stir gently until combined.

## CREAMY PARMESAN ROMAINE

PREPARATION TIME: 10 MINUTES COOKING TIME: 12 MINUTES  
COOLING TIME: 10 MINUTES SERVINGS: 4

### INGREDIENTS:

2 slices whole-wheat bread (about 2 ounces total), cut into 1/2-inch cubes  
8 cups chopped romaine lettuce  
1 cup sliced cucumber  
1/2 cup thinly sliced red onion  
3 tablespoons Original Nestlé Coffee-Mate Liquid Coffee Creamer  
2 tablespoons fat free sour cream  
1 1/2 tablespoons light mayonnaise  
2 tablespoons Buitoni Refrigerated Freshly Shredded Parmesan Cheese  
1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons cider vinegar  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

### DIRECTIONS:

PREHEAT oven to 350 F.

PLACE bread cubes in single layer on large baking sheet. Bake for 12 minutes or until lightly golden. Remove from oven; cool completely.

PLACE lettuce, cucumber and onion in large bowl; set aside.

COMBINE Coffee-mate, sour cream, mayonnaise, cheese, vinegar, salt and pepper in small bowl; stir until completely blended. Add to lettuce mixture; toss gently, yet thoroughly, to coat completely. Add bread cubes; toss gently.

## FRESH FRUIT SALAD

PREPARATION TIME: 20 MINUTES COOLING TIME: 10 MINUTES SERVINGS: 6

### INGREDIENTS

6 cups assorted fresh fruit (berries, grapes, sliced mango, strawberries and/or kiwifruit)  
Juice from 1 lime  
3 tablespoons Tropical Flavor Nestlé Juicy Juice All Natural 100% Juice  
2 teaspoons finely chopped mint leaves

### DIRECTIONS

COMBINE fruit in large bowl. Add lime juice, Juicy Juice and mint; toss gently to coat. Refrigerate until ready to serve.



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