Tips for Better Family Dinners in 2018

What moments filled you and your family with pride in 2017? And what positive changes do you hope to make in 2018?

January (the darkest, coldest month of the year!) can feel like a tough time to start a new habit. But if you stick with a change for 3 weeks, research suggests that the behavior will start to sink in.

Manageable changes are more likely to stick, so try to make resolutions that are achievable and specific. This could be as simple as making more vegetable side dishes, having family dinner an extra night each week or keeping your cell phone pocketed at the table. (See the Resolution Calendar for more ideas of small changes.)

Here are some tips for forming new habits, provided by Dr. Anne Fishel.

1. **Start Small**: Rather than trying to tackle a big goal all at once set small, achievable goals. For example, include more salads with your meals or light candles to make dinner feel special.

2. **Use a Buddy**: Change is often easier with a buddy (or a group!). This person will keep you accountable, cheer you up and suggest ideas when you encounter setbacks. Ask a friend or family member to join you in your goal.

3. **Have a Plan**: What will you do first? How will you chart your progress? What are some obstacles you might encounter? Write down a plan for how you will change your behavior over time.

4. **Focus on You**: Make your resolution a promise to yourself, not to someone else. Every day, remind yourself of why this new behavior is important to you.

5. **Prepare for Missteps**: When you slip, be kind to yourself. Real change can be hard, and setbacks are almost always part of the process. Use stumbles as opportunities to learn something new about yourself.

www.thefamilydinnerproject.org
If your resolution is to have better, more frequent family dinners in 2018, start by asking your family what they would like to improve about dinner. Then, as a group, commit to two or three manageable goals. Here are a few possible family dinner changes (also see the Resolution Handout):

**Eat Healthier:** Carrots, mixed greens, spinach, kale—these vibrant vegetables are great for you! Start small, and try a new veggie side-dish or attempt a “meat free” night. Cooking Light has some excellent vegetarian recipe ideas and you can’t go wrong with a quinoa salad!

**Talk More:** Strengthen family bonds by resolving to have more in-depth conversations at the table. Check out the conversation starters and the discussion ideas on the next page. They can help you move beyond “one word” answers.

**Include Kids in Dinner:** From washing tomatoes to picking out music for the meal, kids can help with dinner in all sorts of ways. This helps them learn valuable cooking skills and encourages family bonding.

**Have More Fun!** Why not make a meal from a favorite book or have the kids transform the dining room into a restaurant? Have a cookie decorating contest. Explore mystery foods by letting your child pick out an unknown fruit or vegetable at the store. Look up information about the food and then try it together as a family. How about a blindfold taste test!? Pick several familiar and enjoyed foods, blindfold family members and have them taste it and see if they can guess correctly. Make sure it’s on a fork or spoon so they can’t get ideas from the feel!

**Plan Meals in Advance:** It takes a bit of forethought, but planning meals can be a huge help. On the weekend, set aside an hour to scan recipes and write down your meals for that week. This cuts down on weekday stress and worrying.

**Change Your Menus:** Make a commitment to try one new food each week as a family. You might decide that you’ll cook a whole new recipe every week, or just start with finding one new item — such as an unfamiliar fruit or vegetable — to work into your familiar menus. Make it extra fun and engaging for everyone by passing around “rating cards” and letting everyone at the table fill in their reactions to the new flavors. Or try picking a country to “visit” during dinner. Make recipes from that region, have some interesting facts written down to share and even decorate your table!

**Tackle it with Teamwork:** Nothing puts you in a family dinner rut faster than being the sole person in charge of planning, shopping, cooking and cleaning up. Get everyone involved in the process by having family members submit menu ideas in a Suggestion Box or on a message board; sending older kids and teens on a grocery Scavenger Hunt to streamline shopping; and creating a rotation to help govern who’s on cooking and clean-up duties. You can even have the kids make dinner one night a week — even young ones can handle simple recipes like Baked Veggie Quesadillas or Homemade Pizza with adult supervision.
Fun:

Reflecting and Resolving

Have family members write down their five proudest moments from 2017, as well as five things they’d like to accomplish in 2018. Once you’re gathered for dinner, share your accomplishments and hopes!

After you’ve shared your real resolutions with each other, have fun with Mad Libs-style resolutions. Fill in the blanks with suggestions from different family members. Then read each resolution out loud!

- This year, ____________ (name) will eat more ____________ (noun) made with organic ____________ (noun) so that he/she will feel more ____________ (adjective).
- This year, ____________ (name) will stop spending money on unnecessary ____________ (nouns) so that he/she can buy the ____________ (adjective) ____________ (noun) that he/she has always wanted.
- This year, ____________ (name) will do ____________ (large number) push-ups for ____________ (small number) minutes so that he/she will have the physique of a ____________ (animal).
- This year, ____________ (name) will meditate for ____________ (number) hours while chanting ____________ (song) in order to find inner ____________ (feeling).

Conversation:

So many things to think about with the start of a new year! Kick off the discussion with these questions.

Ages 2-7
- What has been your favorite part of school this year?
- What is one thing you can do to help a friend next year?
- What’s one fun thing you hope to do in the New Year?

Ages 8-13
- What was your favorite thing that you learned this year (either in school or outside of it)?
- What is one thing you’d like to learn how to do next year?
- What was the most surprising thing that happened to you this year?

Ages 14-100
- What was your favorite news story from this year?
- Think about a time when you have changed something in your life for the better. What was it and how did you do it?
- How do you want to impact the world next year?
Recipe of the Month
Curried Red Lentil Soup

1 Tbls Olive oil
1 clove garlic, minced
1 c. diced carrots
1 c. diced celery
1 c. diced sweet potato
1 c. red lentils, sorted & rinsed
4 c. water
½ tsp salt
1 tsp curry powder


January

National Birth Defects Prevention Month
www.nbdpn.org

National Stalking Awareness Month
www.stalkingawarenessmonth.org

Thyroid Awareness Month
www.thyroidawareness.com

Run/Walk Events

Resolution Run
Jan 1 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/ResolutionRun

Pirate 5k Booty Run
Jan 27 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/Pirate5kBootyrun

Fresno Valentine Run
Feb 11 ~ Woodward Park
http://fresnovalentinerun.com

Chocolate Run
Feb 17 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/ChocolateRun

Reedley College to Parkway Run
Feb 24 ~ Reedley College
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Reedley/college2parkway

Blossom Trail 10K
March 3 ~ Sanger
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Sanger/SangerBlossomTrain10kRun

St. Patrick’s Day Run
March 17 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/StPaddysDayRun

Fresno Donut Run
March 25 ~ Woodward Park

January Birthdays

Jan 8 – Maryam Afshar
Jan 15 – Sandra Herrera
Jan 19 – Philip Rosales
Jan 29 – Rosie Lopez
Jan 30 – Alice Ochoa

Happy Birthday

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