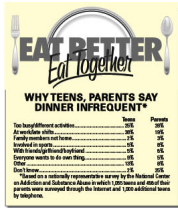


## Study: Family dinners help prevent teen drug use

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 21 October 2010 13:29 -

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**Sitting down with children a way to keep them, families healthy.**

Dinner is over and the plates have been cleared.

If you've eaten together as a family, chances are that your teens are less likely to experiment with alcohol and other drugs.

Based on a new report launched by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, the parental engagement fostered during frequent family dinners is an effective tool to help keep America's kids substance free.

And there are statistics to back that up.

The report finds that teens who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) compared to those who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week) are more than twice as likely to say that they expect to try drugs in the future.

According to the report, The Importance of Family Dinners VI, nearly three-quarters (72%) of teens think that eating dinner frequently with their parents is very or fairly important.

Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are:

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twice as likely to have used tobacco

almost twice as likely to have used alcohol and 1 1/2 times likelier to have used marijuana

“The message for parents couldn’t be any clearer.” said Kathleen Ferrigno, CASA’s marketing director who directs the Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ initiative

During an interview Tuesday, Ferrigno said the family day initiative began after CASA officials realized a relationship between the frequency of family dinners and the number of teens who say they don’t use tobacco or drugs.

With the recent rise nationally in the number of kids age 12 and older who are using drugs, Ferrigno said it’s more important than ever to sit down to dinner and engage children in conversation about their lives, their friends, school.

“Just talk,” she said.

Ferrigno suggests asking questions and really listening to their answers.

“The magic that happens over family dinners isn’t the food on the table but the communication and conversations around it,” she said. “Of course there is no iron-clad guarantee that your kids will grow up drug free, but knowledge is power and the more you know the better the odds are that you will raise a healthy kid.”

If dinner doesn’t work, Ferrigno said it’s very important to carve out time during breakfast, driving to and from school or on weekends for parents to connect with kids.

“Making time to come together sends the message that parents love, care and are there for

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their kids,” she said.

Open communication lines then set the stage for more difficult conversations about drugs, sex or other issues, she said.

Ferrigno points to the report that also reveals that teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week are twice as likely to be able to get marijuana or prescription drugs (to get high) in an hour or less. Teens who are having five or more family dinners per week are more likely to say that they do not have any access to marijuana and prescription drugs (to get high).

Interestingly, she said the trends this year shows that 60% of teens report having dinner with their families at least five times a week which is a proportion that has remained consistent over the past decade.

“Parents play a powerful role in prevention,” Ferrigno said.

In addition, teens who have frequent family dinners are less likely to report having friends who use substances.

Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA founder and chairman and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, said it’s been long known that the more often children have dinner with their parents the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs.

“In today’s busy and overscheduled world, taking the time to come together for dinner really makes a difference in a child’s life,” Califano said.

More information is available on CASA’s website which is [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org).

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Readers might also pencil in the fourth Monday in September for next year.

That date has been declared “A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™.”

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