

Staying Healthy by Eating In

Restaurant other commercially prepared foods are notoriously high in fat, salt and sugar. These foods are fine as an occasional indulgence or for a special occasion, but usually not healthy as a regular diet.

According to research, eating home-cooked meals leads to better health than eating out frequently. While that's not surprising, there are other benefits too:

Better-balanced meals

Studies have found that eating out will increase your calorie, sodium and fat intake by at least 50%, although if you only eat out occasionally, taking in that extra food is not going to throw your weight off the charts in the long run.

Families that eat at home most days have higher intakes of health-promoting nutrients such as calcium, fiber, iron, and vitamins B6, B12, C and E, according to research conducted at Harvard University. They also consume less saturated fat.

Benefits to your kids

Research has found that children who eat home-cooked meals frequently are less likely to be overweight. Studies have also found that family meals tend to contain more fruits and vegetables and less fried food, sodium and trans fat.

Even better, teens whose families eat together frequently are less likely to use alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, according to a survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. They also tend to get better grades, while other surveys have found that they are happier with life in general.

Food allergies and sensitivities

Preparing meals at home allows you to easily accommodate family members or guests who have allergies or food intolerances, some of which can be severe such as peanut and shellfish allergies can lead to life-threatening emergencies.

Gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley, is difficult for some people to digest and causes a serious autoimmune response in a small percentage of people.

Food safety

Food-borne illnesses caused by bacteria-laden or undercooked meats and vegetables are unfortunately common. According to University of Kansas food safety expert Dr. Douglas Powell, up to 25% of the population succumbs to a food-borne illness each year.

While food you buy at the grocery store might be similarly contaminated, if you pay attention to proper food handling and cooking techniques, you may be safer.

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