Family Meals Reduce Kids' Obesity Risk

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Children who regularly sit down at the table to eat with their families are thinner, healthier and less likely to suffer from eating disorders than kids who don't, according to a new study published in *Pediatrics* and reported by HealthDay News.

For the study, researchers examined studies involving nearly 183,000 children and teenagers, ages 3 to 17. Scientists reviewed youth's eating habits and weight, plus whether kids did anything harmful to control their weight.

Researchers found that kids who ate three or more meals each week with their families were 12 percent less likely to be overweight and 20 percent less likely to drink soda and eat sweets, fried foods and other unhealthy foods than those who ate few or no meals with their families.

What's more, kids who ate five or more meals each week with their families enjoyed an extra health benefit: They reduced their chances of suffering from poor nutrition by 25 percent.

In addition, kids who had regular family meals were 35 percent less likely to binge-eat, purge, take diet pills or laxatives, induce vomiting, skip meals or smoke to lose weight.

While the reasons why family meals promoted healthier eating habits among kids aren't exactly clear, one possible explanation may include the benefit of having adult role models and adult intervention before poor eating habits set in, researchers explained.

In addition, other research shows meals prepared at home are more nutritious, containing more fruits and veggies and less fat and sugar.

Study authors recommended that doctors emphasize the value of family meals to patients battling obesity and eating disorders.

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