

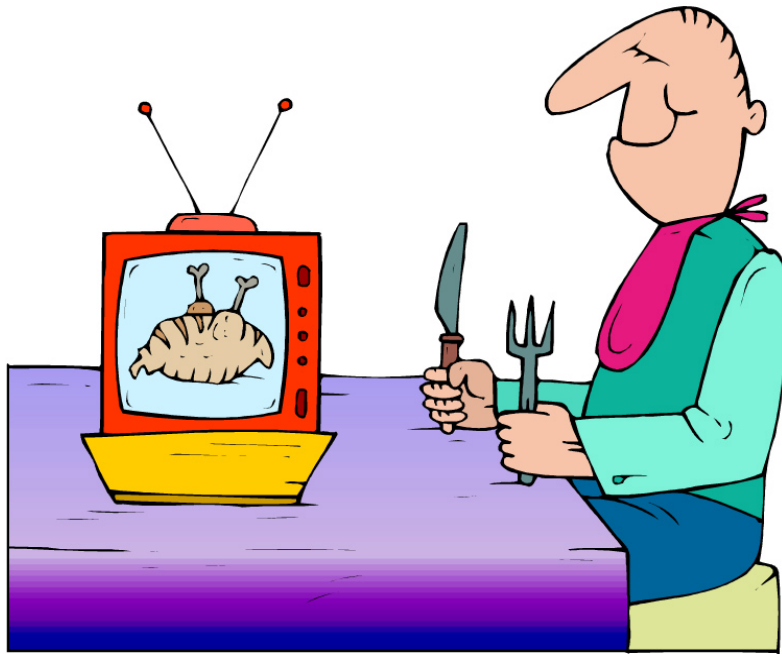
OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Take TV off the Menu

Junior is eating pizza in his bedroom, plopped on his bed in front of the television. Dad is at his desk in his den, paying bills while eating a sandwich and surfing channels in search of his favorite sitcoms. And Mom is munching on last night's leftovers while she tunes in for the latest stock market news on the tube in the kitchen.

Dr. Smith understands that today's hectic lifestyles have made the dining room table virtually obsolete. The cost isn't just sacrificed family time, however. It's sacrificed health. And that's something Dr. Smith finds increasingly alarming.



The advent of the Swanson® TV dinner in 1954 launched an instant dining room exodus. Initially, it only went as far as the living room. Today, however, people are nibbling and noshing all over the house. And they're gaining weight along the way too.

Read on to learn why Dr. Smith encourages patients to avoid eating in front of the television or beyond the kitchen or dining room table.

Get the Most From Your Meals

Dr. Smith is committed to helping patients adopt the *chiropractic lifestyle*, a philosophy that focuses on preventing health concerns before they occur. One of the best ways to accomplish this is through proper nutrition — something that's virtually impossible to attain with the "junk food" and "fast food" diet associated with watching television while eating.

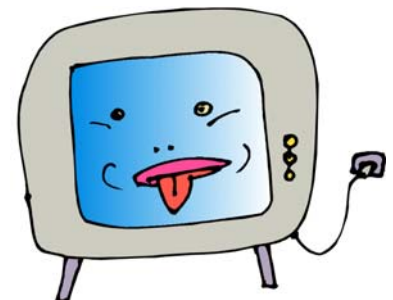
Car chases, murder investigations and high-intensity dramas make for unnerving dinner partners. Dr. Smith urges patients to turn off the television while eating and savor — not inhale — their meals. This allows for proper digestion and enhances the body's ability to convert food into energy.

Optimize Nutrition

Chowing down in front of the tube leads to poorer nutrition.

In Canada, researchers studied the eating patterns of 534 youngsters between the ages of 10 and 12. "Significant positive correlations were found between eating in the bedroom, or eating in front of the television or the computer, and the consumption of low-density food, foods high in sugar and fat, and foods low in fiber." (*Can J Diet Pract Res* 2007;68:42-5.)

Part of the problem is the content of television programs. In an analysis of prime-time TV programming and commercials, researchers discovered that food was referred to an average of 4.8 times every half hour. And that's *excluding* commercials! During one three-hour block of programming studied, a whopping 134 food references took place.



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The researchers noted that “over half of the food references made during the TV show were regarding low-nutrient foods such as coffee, alcohol, soft drinks, sweets and salty foods.” (*Am J Public Health* 1990;80:738.)

The most commonly mentioned foods? Hamburgers, fried chicken and pizza. In contrast, “none of the commercials made a reference to salads or salad bars and few made mention of fruit or vegetables,” concluded the researchers.

Another study of 91 children also revealed that “the dietary patterns of children from families in which television viewing is a normal part of meal routines may include fewer fruits and vegetables and more pizzas, snack foods, and sodas than the dietary patterns of children from families in which television viewing and eating are separate activities.” (*Pediatrics* 2001;101:E7.)

Keep Track of Calories

It’s simple to lose track of calories when munching in front of the tube. You become so engrossed in what’s happening on screen that you miss what’s happening on your plate and in your mouth. The end result is that normal mealtime satiation — the body’s signal that you’re full — is delayed, sparking overeating (*Pediatr Res* 2007;Epub).

Avoid Choking Hazards

Being preoccupied while eating — whether it’s a television show or a lively conversation — can create choking hazards. Take care to thoroughly chew each bite and savor every morsel.

Focus on Family and Food

To break the TV-mealtime habit, start by banishing TV trays! The next step is to clear the dining room or kitchen table of any clutter. Purchasing new placemats or a tablecloth are also fun ways to jazz up a neglected table and inspire family members to gather round.

And you don’t have to be a gourmet cook to create nourishing fare. Keep it simple by limiting preparation time and number of ingredients. Fresh, organic produce and quality lean meats don’t need a lot of adulterating to taste phenomenal.

Get Everyone Involved

Steer your family clear of the TV by making meal preparation a group project!

This is particularly important for adolescents. “The proportion of children eating dinner with their families declines with age and has decreased over time,” say researchers from Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass., who studied 8,677 girls and 7,525 boys between the ages of 9 and 14 years.

“Approximately 17 percent of participants ate dinner with members of their family never or some days, 40 percent on most days, and 43 percent every day.

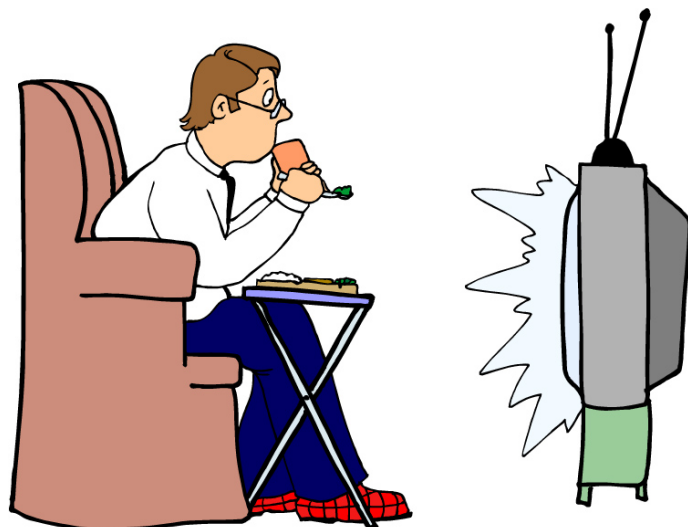
percentage of energy.” These patterns were similar for boys and girls.

The positive effects of family meals can all be undone, however, by inviting the television set to dinner. “Family dinners and dinners without television on are independent predictors of [increased] servings of fruits or vegetables offered to preschool children.

Because dietary habits and preferences are established early in life, parents should be counseled to promote family meal environments that support healthful eating.” (*J Am Diet Assoc* 2007;107:666-71.)

For More Information

To learn more about turning off the TV and turning on to wellness — both at mealtime and all the times in between — go to tvturnoff.org — a non-profit organization that encourages children and adults to watch less television.



More than half of the 9-year-olds ate family dinner every day, whereas only about one third of 14-year-olds did so.” (*Arch Fam Med* 2000;9:235.)

The most significant finding, however, was that an increased frequency of family dinners was associated with “substantially higher intake of several nutrients, including fiber, calcium, folate, iron, vitamins B6, B12, C, and E; lower glycemic load; and lower intake of saturated and trans fat as a

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