

## Getting through Meals

Family meals provide a chance for family members to reconnect, show an interest in each others daily lives, and nourish bodies and souls together. They are designed to meet emotional as well as nutritional needs. While today's busy family lifestyles make having regular family meals a challenge, this is further compounded when someone in the household has an eating disorder. Meals can then become tense and unpleasant, loaded with big issues around autonomy, power and control. Arguments can ensue about what foods are served, how they are cooked, whether everyone has to eat at the table, or how much food has to be eaten. It is important to consider what can be done to maintain familiar healthy family rituals around eating and meals, while at the same time supporting a loved one struggling with an eating disorder. This is not easy to do!

One important thing to remember is that the eating disorder should **not** be allowed to "run the house". This might look like favourite foods no longer being allowed at the table or in the house, different rules for different members, altering family rituals around eating and meals to accommodate the eating disorder. A second important thing to remember is that the eating disorder does not get to make decisions around safety. If your son or daughter has not taken care of their health consider whether they or those around them are at risk when involved in some activities such as driving a car or baby sitting. Remember that starvation changes how people think, feel and behave. Family meals can provide an opportunity to monitor how your loved one is managing this aspect of their health so that safety decisions can be made.

**Many parents with the best of intentions end up supporting the eating disorder rather than their son or daughter, particularly at mealtimes.**

### Turn meals back into family time:

1. Talk to your kids about their day. Talk about things unrelated to dieting, calories, weight or shape.
2. Turn off the television.
3. Start out with a relaxing, pleasant atmosphere- lights, music, table place settings etc.
4. Don't nag, police, prompt or bribe your loved one to eat.
5. Enjoy your own meal.
6. Serve your traditional family foods from all food groups including those enjoyed by everyone.  
The eating disorder shouldn't get to decide what everyone eats.
7. Don't use family times to scold, nag or fight.
8. Everyone gets a turn to talk.

Don't Say	Do Say
Don't you think you've had enough?	How are you doing with that?
Is that what the staff said?	What can I do to support you?
Is that on your meal plan?	What's going to be most helpful?

Satter (2005)