



## ASK DR. DANA

**Q. Why is family mealtime so important? What are the benefits?**

**A. *September 28th is National Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™***

This is a national movement launched by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse ([CASA](#)) at Columbia University to remind parents that frequent family **Dinners Make A Difference!** Parental engagement fostered at the dinner table can be a simple, effective tool to help prevent substance abuse in kids.

***Frequent Family Dinners are Linked to Better Grades for Teens and Reduced Risk for Substance Abuse***

More than a decade of research has consistently found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs and the better they perform in school.

CASA's most recent study compared two specific groups: teenagers who have two or less family dinners per week and those who have five or more per week.

***Those Who Ate Two or Less Family Dinners Were:***

- Three times more likely to try marijuana
- Two-and-a-half times more likely to smoke cigarettes
- One-and-a-half times more likely to drink alcohol

**Ten Benefits of Family Dinners**

*Teens that have frequent family dinners are:*

1. At half the risk for substance abuse compared to teens who eat with their families less frequently
2. More likely to get better grades
3. Less likely to have friends who use illicit drugs
4. More likely to have lower levels of tension and stress
5. More likely to say that their parents were proud of them
6. More emotionally stable
7. More likely to have positive relationships
8. More likely to have healthier eating habits



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9. Less likely to contemplate suicide
10. Less likely to try marijuana or have friends who do

### **The Challenge for Busy Families!**

We know that that shared dinners make for stronger families. The problem is that between after-school activity schedules and parents' busy work schedules, making connections within the family requires a concerted effort.

### **Tips for Making the Most Out of Family Dinners:**

1. Make family dinners a requirement
2. Involve your teenagers in all phases of the meal
3. Go around the table and take turns starting a topic or asking a silly question
4. Take turns expressing "highs and lows" of the day
5. Ask open-ended questions to get your teens talking

### **Additional Facts from CASA:**

- Kids are particularly vulnerable to substance use during transitions from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and from high school to college.
  
- More than forty percent of America's teens – some 10 million – can buy marijuana within a day and 20 percent—some 5 million—can get it in an hour or less.
  
- Each day more than 13,000 children and teens take their first drink.
  
- Children and teens that begin drinking before age 15 are four times likelier to become alcohol dependent than those who do not drink before age 21.



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- More than five million high school students, almost a third, admit binge drinking at least once a month.
- On average, teenagers who use alcohol, tobacco and marijuana begin using them between 12 and 14 years of age, with some of the highest risk kids starting to use even earlier.