



The family that dines together ... also stays together

Dinners are the family routine event that produces the most dividends

The customs are changing. The habits of families are changing and not necessarily for the better. According to some studies at Harvard University, only 50 percent of American families have family dinners or spend time a week around the table and in a relaxed way. Also, many of these meetings are "intervened" by the use of cell phones, tablets, or any other element that isolates in some way to any of the members. This happens when there are small children, and unfortunately also when the children are older because they eat as they come home and alone.

The Family Dinner Project (fdp or, in Spanish, Proyecto Cenas en Familia) is an initiative promoted by the Zero Project developed by Harvard University to create family moments like this daily dinner, in a way that helps them to strengthen and to grow both physically and personally.

Physical and psychic benefits

Anne Fishel is one of the promoters of the initiative and says in her book *Home for Dinner: Mixing Food, Fun, and Conversation for a Happier Family and Healthier Kids* (At home for dinner: combining food, leisure and conversation for your family be happier and your children are healthier) that the dinners are the event of the family routine "that produces the most dividends". It is more: "Those who dine together suffer less stress and their members feel much more united." Another of its virtues is that "when they reach adolescence, the children of these families are less likely to suffer from eating disorders or depression, as well as to abuse certain substances or to exercise their sexuality early".

On the one hand, dinner can become a space for daily entertainment and, at the same time, ensures a healthier diet: "It is proven that, during family dinners, children eat less fat, sugar, and salt, and that they learn to eat more vegetables and vegetables, so it decreases the likelihood of suffering obesity. Also, it has been shown that when these children begin to take charge of their diet, they maintain these healthy habits. "

Intellectual benefits

But it is not only the food field, but Fishel also refers to the intellectual: "The conversation that takes place around the table significantly increases the vocabulary of children, even more than reading stories before sleep, and also improves their school performance. " Of course, it is a time for parents to help channel their children with criteria and values because conversations lend themselves to it.

How to proceed?

There is no single recipe for this plan. The ideal is the constancy, and therefore the daily dinner is the ideal plan. Now, sometimes the family members travel, there are exam times, incompatible schedules ... which makes "plan A" difficult. A second option may be to meet at breakfast, at snack, and, even better, during weekends. The important thing is to dedicate that sacred time to the family and not let anything disturb it.

You have to get it to be desired and establish this "family appointment", in a previously arranged time and space. And, for this, the best ritual begins with the preparation of the food, the setting of the table and the gathering, all together and all cooperating.

Technology ... out!

Electronic devices are a great distraction. They also cause isolation. And a dinner prepared to be with the family can not be compatible with the isolation of one of the members. Television can sometimes help if it serves to establish a dialogue, but cell phones and tablets are, by themselves, enemies of the plan. There are 24 hours a day to attend the cell phone, except for dinner time.

Bad if the children are the ones who use it, worse if it is the parents who are distracted by them. So Professor Fishel proposes that adults be the first to modify their behavior and that they "set clear parameters: 'we are going to leave the cell phones in a basket' or 'we are only going to use the mobile phone to share between us (a funny picture, an e-mail ...), but not to communicate with someone who is not with us at the table ".

Everyone cooperates

Everyone in the family has a unique role. And children, however small they may be, have something to say and do. It can be from the elaboration of the menus to setting the table. You can be accompanying your parents to purchase food, or when they are older learn to cook. Everything yields, because today's little diner will be tomorrow's cook ... Today's son is tomorrow's father.

What you have learned in your family as a child, you will put it to work tomorrow:
"Most children like to help and we should encourage them to do it".