

How Dinner Time Can Bring Families Together *Chef Reveals Why Sunday Dinners Are So Important*

It all starts at mealtime.

That's what the statistics show, and at least one chef can attest to it. According to a study released last week by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, the family dinner is linked to everything from better grades to teen use of alcohol. The study, called "The Importance of Family Dinners," said that teens who report typically receiving grades of C's or below in school are likelier to smoke, drink and use drugs compared to teens who typically receive all A's or A's and B's in school. Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are one and a half times likelier to report getting mostly C's or lower grades in school.

Joe Fitzpatrick knows the value of family dinners, because it has become a tradition in his household every weekend. Fitzpatrick, author of the gourmet cookbook **Strictly Sundays** from Book Publisher's Network (www.strictlysundays.com), believes his Sunday dinners are what help keep his family close. It was part of how he was raised.

"Ever since I was a little boy I enjoyed helping my mother cook in the kitchen," he said. "She made it fun and I learned a lot. Of course that was in the 1960's when the only cook on television was Julia Child. There were no fancy spices or sauces used in our house and all the meals were pretty basic, but that didn't matter. I remember the time we spent together, and it helped shape my attitudes when I had children of my own."

Fitzpatrick's focus on mealtime evolved out of the experience most people are having today – working hard with a tight budget, and not having much time for family.

"I owned a business in the 1980's and spent little time at home," he said. "My wife and I would make it a point to go out to dinner every Saturday night to spend some time with each other. When the business went away so did the money. But I still liked good food. I subscribed to Bon Appetite magazine and started to make unique intimate dinners for the two of us on Saturday nights."

When the kids got wind of the Saturday night dinners, they felt like they were missing out on something good. They were right.

“Then our children got older, saw what we were having for our Saturday night gourmet dinner and asked why they didn’t get special meals too,” Fitzpatrick added. “So I started to explore and create both new and traditional dinners for them on Sunday nights. When the kids had jobs, I made a rule that Sunday was for faith & family, no exceptions. They almost never missed one of my Sunday dinners. And as they have grown and established their own lives, they still come home once a week to help in the kitchen and help me create these fabulous meals. It used to be about the food. Now, it’s more about being together.”

About Joe Fitzpatrick

Joe Fitzpatrick is a family man who loves to cook. Though he has never owned a restaurant or worked as a chef, he combined the lessons his mother taught him with his love for the culinary arts to produce a cookbook of comfort foods that look and taste like gourmet dishes. Author of the cookbook **Strictly Sundays** (www.strictlysundays.com), Fitzpatrick realizes that gourmet meals can be served any day of the week. His family simply prefers Sundays.