



## IT'S DINNER TIME:

A Report on Low-Income Families' Efforts to Plan, Shop for and Cook Healthy Meals



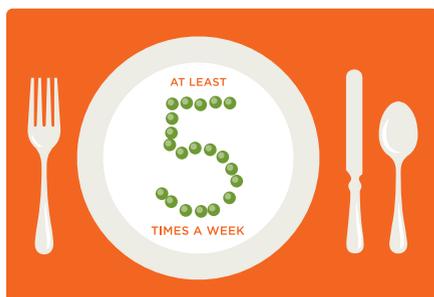
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Assumptions are rampant about the dining habits of low-income Americans, including that they are frequent consumers of fast food and that they do not eat together often as a family or prioritize healthy eating. Through *It's Dinnertime: A Report on Low-Income Families' Efforts to Plan, Shop for, and Cook Healthy Meals*, we learn that low-income families are cooking dinner at home, mostly from scratch, and are highly interested in making healthy meals.

## 8 IN 10 LOW-INCOME FAMILIES MAKE DINNER AT HOME



A gap exists, however, between the healthy eating aspirations of low-income Americans and their ability to consistently prepare nourishing meals for their families. The perceived cost of healthy items is a barrier, which can be overcome through the adoption of strategic shopping and cooking skills, such as those taught by Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters®.

To gain insights into the cooking and shopping habits of low-income Americans, Share Our Strength enlisted APCO Insight to conduct a national survey of 1,500 low to middle-income families in the United States. The results are eye-opening.

Eight in 10 families make dinner at home at least five times a week. Most of the time, low-income families are cooking dinners at home from scratch. They are using easy-to-prepare packaged foods on other nights.

Low-income families want to make healthy meals, and believe eating healthy is realistic for them, but are struggling to do so. Eighty-five percent of respondents say that eating healthy meals is important to their families, and 78% are interested in learning more about cooking healthy meals that taste good. But there's a gap between what people aspire to and what they're able to accomplish: Only 53% of families are accomplishing eating healthy meals at home most days in a typical week.

Families view cost as the primary barrier to healthy eating. Although families are largely satisfied with the variety (61%) and quality (64%) of healthy grocery items available to them, only 30% are satisfied with price.

## LOW-INCOME FAMILIES WANT TO MAKE HEALTHY MEALS, AND BELIEVE EATING HEALTHY IS REALISTIC FOR THEM.

Time is a barrier for some, especially families where the food decision maker works full time. This demographic has a significantly lower average number of healthy or made-from-scratch dinners in a typical week.

### IN A TYPICAL WEEK, A LOW-INCOME FAMILY...





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A better understanding of the health benefits of frozen and canned fruits and vegetables could put more healthy options within reach for low-income families. Eighty-five percent of families skip healthy purchases at the grocery store because of price and fresh produce is passed over most often. Fresh produce is rated extremely healthy by 81% of respondents, but that rating drops down to 32% when it comes to frozen fruits and vegetables and 12% with canned fruits and vegetables.

Practical information and simple strategies, especially around planning meals and food budgeting, can help low-income families get healthy meals on the table more often. Low-income families that regularly plan meals, write grocery lists and budget for food make healthy meals from scratch more often (5+ times a week) than those who don't. Unfortunately, 55% of families don't regularly plan meals before going to the store, and 34% don't regularly use a written grocery list.

Low-income families are eager for tips and educational tools that will make preparing healthy meals easier and more affordable. One in 2 families are extremely interested in learning more about cooking healthy meals, and 2 in 3 families are interested in how to better budget their money for meals.

Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters helps families plan, shop for and cook healthy meals with documented success. After *Cooking Matters for Adults*, the average graduate plans meals ahead of time 55% more often and shops with a grocery list 50% more often. At the grocery store, a Cooking Matters graduate compares prices 38% more often. Graduates are able to make their food money last longer, running out of food 20% less often.

“WE COOK HEALTHY MEALS ON A DAILY BASIS. I JUST WISH IT WAS CHEAPER.” – Survey Respondent



OF LOW-INCOME PARENTS SAY THAT  
**EATING HEALTHY MEALS IS IMPORTANT TO THEIR FAMILIES**

## ABOUT SHARE OUR STRENGTH'S COOKING MATTERS®

Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters® teaches families at risk of hunger how to get more food for their money and better nourishment from those foods. Volunteer culinary and nutrition experts lead six-week cooking and nutrition courses and hour-long Shopping Matters® grocery store tours. Participants learn how to select nutritious and low-cost ingredients and prepare them in ways that are delicious and healthy. Cooking Matters is nationally sponsored by the ConAgra Foods® Foundation and Walmart.

Cooking Matters plays an essential role in Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign—a national effort to end childhood hunger in America. The No Kid Hungry Campaign connects children at risk of hunger to the healthy foods they need by increasing access to federal food and nutrition programs and educating families with the skills and knowledge to get more from their food resources and put healthy meals on the table, every day.

In 2011, Cooking Matters helped 100,000 individuals at risk of hunger in 41 states get more from their food resources—more than double the number of people reached in 2010. Today, 85 percent of participants in our six-week courses graduate, taking with them improved nutrition practices, eating habits and food budgeting skills.

For more information, visit [CookingMatters.org](http://CookingMatters.org).

The ConAgra Foods Foundation invests in proven national and community-based nonprofit organizations with innovative approaches to fighting child hunger and educating children and families on how to get the most nutritional value from their food budgets. One of the ways the Foundation accomplishes this is by funding research such as *It's Dinnertime: A Report on American Low-Income Families' Efforts to Plan, Show for and Cook Healthy Meals*, to better understand and address the issue of child hunger in the U.S.

For more information on the ConAgra Foods Foundation, please visit [ConAgraFoodsFoundation.org](http://ConAgraFoodsFoundation.org).

Read the full report at [CookingMatters.org/ItsDinnertime](http://CookingMatters.org/ItsDinnertime).



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