

If your family is like most American families, you eat away from home several times a week. Restaurant meals can offer the same benefits of meals at home, if you order healthful options, watch serving sizes (sharing or taking half home are easy ways to smart-size portions), and take time to enjoy each other's company. Here are five tried-and-true ideas for positive activities to enjoy **wherever** you eat out. (If anyone stares, it is just because they wish they were having as much fun!)

Read aloud while you wait for food.

ASK ANY TEACHER: reading aloud is one of the best ways for children to improve their reading levels, increase their vocabulary, and enhance their overall language skills. If you choose a chapter in a book with the right reading level and give everyone a chance to read, this can become a real family activity. (If you forget to bring a book, newspapers can work too.)



Share make-believe stories.

IF YOU FORGOT A BOOK and no one seems to have anything to talk about, you can always let children's imaginations run wild. Given the chance, most children love to make up stories. Get everyone involved with a round-robin story, where each family member has a minute or two to tell what happens next (also a great way to teach about taking turns!).



Play word games.

WORD GAMES are more than a fun way to interact while you are waiting for the food to be served. They can actually help improve children's language skills (a key to good grades in school). All you need is paper (placemat?) and pencil to enjoy a game of Hangman or Pictionary.[®] Need more ideas? Check with your child's teacher or childcare provider.



Play other mind games.

RIDDLES, PUZZLES, AND CARD GAMES also work well at restaurant mealtimes. Mind Trap[®] (online and at toy stores) combines all three in a popular family game. A small box (can be kept in the car) holds 100s of challenging puzzles, mysteries, conundrums, and trick questions. Someone reads the question off a card; then individuals or teams try to solve it.



Walk and talk together.

MOST AMERICAN FAMILIES do not get the physical activity they need to stay strong and healthy. A simple walk (before or after dinner) is an easy way to add 15 or 20 minutes of fun activity – and some quality talk time – to your family's day. Choose a restaurant near your home, a park or a playground – or walk around a nearby mall when the weather is bad.

