

## SPONSORS



April 2007

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of our 2007 campaign on ***Eating Together, Playing Together*** - all about the interrelated issues of too much screen time (TV/DVD/video games/computers) and too few family meals. Perfect for **TV-Turnoff Week (4/23-29)**, the fitness handout and press release focus on **why and how to reduce screen time**. The nutrition handout outlines **five easy ways to enjoy mealtime conversations**.

The important connections between childhood overweight and family habits related to eating together and TV watching were discussed in a January 2007 *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* article: ***Television Watching and Frequency of Family Meals Are Predictive of Overweight Onset and Persistence in a National Sample of School-Aged Children*** (pp. 53-61). In discussing their findings from 8,000 children followed from kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, Gable et al note: *"Changes must occur in family life and children's routines if overweight trends are to reverse direction. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms whereby television, family meals, and parents' perceptions of neighborhood safety put children at risk for weight problems. A multifaceted, multidisciplinary approach to overweight prevention that involves family life educators and registered dietitians, among others, is one place to begin."*

To support your work in these critical areas, ERM is pleased to offer you additional creative tools this month – **cards for families to use as conversation starters at meals and tips for Screen-Free Fun**. A reduced-size sample of the conversation starters is on page 5 of this packet. All the cards are available for free download on the ERM website at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm). These cards feature ERM logos. If you'd like cards personalized with the logo of your program – **for a donation to Eat Right Montana**, contact Dayle Hayes at [EatRightMT2000@aol.com](mailto:EatRightMT2000@aol.com) for details.

**Healthy Families** packets are made possible with the generous support of agencies, organizations, and individuals. Please join us in thanking the 2007 sponsors listed on the left. If you utilize this information and can make a donation to support positive, practical messages for families, please contact ERM Chair Katie Bark at 406-994-5641 or [kbark@mt.gov](mailto:kbark@mt.gov)

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# Five Successful Ways to Reduce Screen Time

Cutting back on screen time – television, movies at home, DVDs, video games, and computer entertainment – is one of the smartest moves that a family can make. Here are five ways to make it easier than you ever imagined it might be:

## ★ Make the commitment.

Spend time talking with your entire family about the benefits of reducing the amount of screen time for everyone. Emphasize the positives – and focus on the fact that these changes will give you more time to spend doing fun and creative things together. Some families find it helpful to sign a ‘pledge’ together.

## ★ Have a plan and stick to it.

Identify how much time you currently spend with screen entertainment. **Decide how to gradually reduce the total amount of screen time.** Taking TV out of a child’s bedroom is a very helpful step. Some families set a specific number of hours per day; others designate specific times (like 4 to 6 PM) as screen-free.

## ★ Be patient.

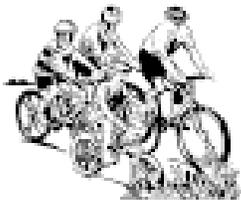
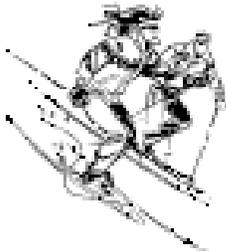
Reducing the amount of time that your family spends plugged into screens is a **major change**. It is often helpful to make this significant a change in small steps rather than in giant leaps. In fact, many children will hardly notice if you gradually decrease their TV or video game time in 15-minute increments.

## ★ Be creative.

The theme for TV-Turnoff Week – April 23 through 29, 2007 – is *Imagine the Possibilities*. Use family time to brainstorm creative ways to spend screen-free hours. For more ideas, go to [www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org). Download the Eat Right Montana tips from [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)

## ★ Treasure your time together.

The really good news about screen-free time is that it gives families more opportunities to really be together. It gives you more time to talk, more time to dream, more time to be physically active, more time to read, more time to share values, and more time to enjoy each other’s company.



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

a coalition representing health, nutrition and active lifestyles

# Five Easy Ways to Enjoy Mealtime Conversations

Family mealtimes really matter – to children and to adults. More positive mealtime experiences mean more family communication, improved performance at school, enhanced reading levels, and healthier weights for children. Here are five easy ways to enhance the quality of your family's conversations around the table.

## ● Create a relaxed atmosphere.

Quality conversations require a calming atmosphere – with minimal distractions. This means turning off the TV and radio news programs; it also means setting aside cell phones (except for emergency calls, of course). Music can be a nice addition – if it is tranquil, peaceful, and played at low volume.

## ● Focus on laughter and learning.

Meals are generally not productive times to discuss difficult or stressful issues. They are wonderful times to share funny stories and to learn new views on current events. Make a family commitment to focus only on the positive at the mealtimes. Save disciplinary matters and problems for another time of day.

## ● Respect and involve every family member.

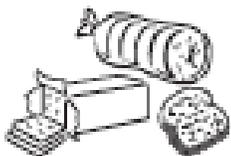
Even very small children want to be part of the conversation. Make a conscious effort to engage everyone at the table. Be patient with those who take longer to express a thought – and actively seek out the opinions of those who tend to be quieter. Sometimes it helps to go around the table person-by-person.

## ● Use conversation starters.

Tired of conversations that fall silent after a minute or two? Conversation starter cards may be just what your family needs to keep things lively at the table. **Eat Right Montana Conversation Starters for two age levels are available for no cost at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)**

## ● Enjoy different viewpoints.

Promoting positive conversations doesn't mean that everyone has to agree on everything. Establish a few ground rules – like no teasing, criticizing, rude comments about other people, or talking while someone else is talking. Listen thoughtfully to each other – and help children learn to appreciate differences.





FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**EATING TOGETHER, PLAYING TOGETHER**  
Celebrating Healthy Families 2007

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**April 1, 2007**

## **Smart Family Moves: Less TV, More Meals Together**

If you are a parent or a grandparent, you naturally want the best for the children in your family. You want them to be happy and healthy. You want them to do well in school and be successful in life. What you may not realize is that a couple of simple family habits can help your children achieve everything that you hope for them. The two important habits are reducing 'screen time' (TV, DVD, video games, and computers) and eating more meals together. They are so important to children that everyone from your family's pediatrician to their classroom teachers recommends them.

"Research shows that reducing screen time is one key to ensuring children's health and success at school," says Cathy Costakis of the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program. "Screen time includes TV, DVDs, movies, video games, and computers – screens that have, in many ways, taken over children's lives. Overall, children spend more total hours with screen entertainment than they do in school – or any pursuit other than sleeping. And, with about two-thirds of school aged children having a TV in their bedroom, screens are interfering with needed sleep as well!"

For optimal health and development, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV or videos for children two years and under, no more than two hours of total quality screen time for older children and no TVs in children's bedrooms. Since the average time American kids spend in front of screens is 4 hours, 41 minutes per day, most families have some reducing to do.

April is the perfect time to cut back on your family's screen time. Days are longer and warmer – and the beautiful Big Sky outdoors is beckoning. "April is also time to celebrate **TV-Turnoff Week**, April 23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>," notes Costakis, who is planning screen-free fun in the Bozeman area and encouraging other Montana communities to do the same. The goal of **TV-Turnoff Week** is to promote active living and motivate kids, families, and adults to try living without TV, videos, or computer games, for a week. The long-term goal is to moderate the use of screens for more active, healthier, closer, and happier families. For more information, check out [www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org) and contact Cathy Costakis at 406-994-5734 or [costakis@montana.edu](mailto:costakis@montana.edu)

Regular family mealtimes are also closely linked to children's health and academic performance. Studies show that children who eat more meals with their families are less likely to be overweight by third grade and more likely to report getting As and Bs as teenagers. Forty percent of families report sometimes or always watching TV during meals, which interferes with quality conversations and distracts children from both eating when they are hungry and stopping when they are full.

As part of its 2007 campaign on **Eating Together, Playing Together**, Eat Right Montana (ERM) has developed some helpful tools for moving your family toward less TV time and more enjoyable mealtime conversations. "We're excited to share our brand-new **Conversation Starters** and **Screen-Free Fun Tips** on easy-to-use cards for Montana families," says Ms. Costakis. The cards – and past issues of ERM's Healthy Families packets can be downloaded free from their web site at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm). According to Costakis, these tips and suggestions can help families with children of all ages enjoy more quality time together.

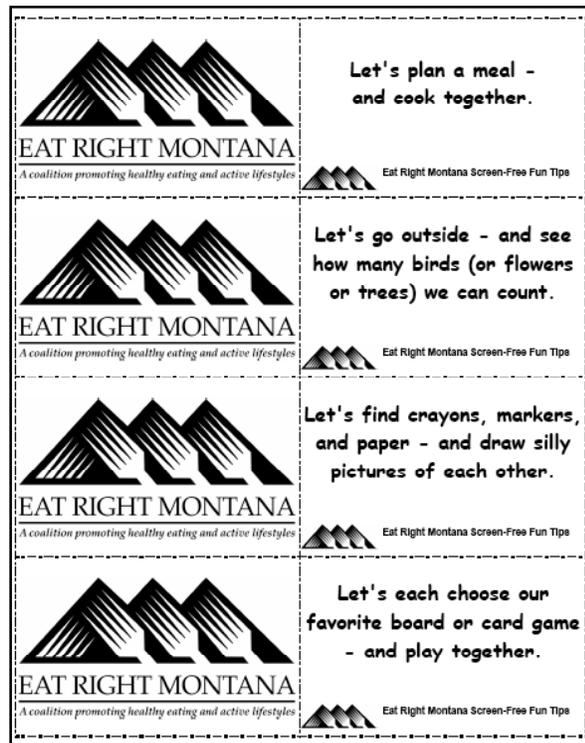
# ERM CARDS FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

These are two samples of EAT RIGHT MONTANA's Screen-Free Fun Tips.

When two pages of tips are **printed back-to-back & cut along the dotted lines**, they create cards with tips on one side & the ERM logo on the other side.

For SCREEN-FREE FUN TIPS and CONVERATION STARTER cards for families with kids of preschool & elementary ages (two different sets), visit the ERM website at:

[www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)



You may print & use ALL the cards on the website for educational purposes with the EAT RIGHT MONTANA logo intact.

If you would like to have these cards personalized with your program's logo – for a donation to EAT RIGHT MONTANA, please contact Dayle Hayes at [EatRightMT2000@aol.com](mailto:EatRightMT2000@aol.com) for details & suggested donations.

