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Family Meals Make Healthier Eaters

These days, getting the whole family around the table at the same time can require the scheduling prowess of an air traffic controller. With work, meetings, and after-school activities, sitting down to a family dinner can seem impossible. But it's not -- and it's definitely worth the effort, because breaking bread together can benefit the entire family. Here's how:

- According to researchers at Syracuse University, family routines such as eating dinner together nightly are associated with happier marriages, improved children's health, and stronger family ties.
- Family meals are the perfect time to teach kids good manners and to model appropriate table etiquette. Sharing pleasant conversation around the dinner table can also help improve a child's social skills.
- Dining together makes for healthier eaters. Kids who regularly eat with their families tend to have healthier eating patterns. They consume more fruits and vegetables and fewer fried foods, sodas, and saturated fat than kids who don't share family meals, says the American Dietetic Association.

By Kristen Finello, AmericanBaby.com

Note: "To the lack of right home training may be traced the larger share of the disease and misery and crime that curse humanity. If the home life were pure and true, if the children who went forth from its care were prepared to meet life's responsibilities and dangers, what a change would be seen in the world!"

The Ministry of Healing, p.351

TV beer ads have paved the way for TV liquor ads

The distilled-spirits industry has found a comfortable home for its ads on cable networks, the New York Times reported Dec. 15.

Commercials for vodka, gin, whiskey, and other distilled spirits can be seen on 24 cable networks, such as AMC, VH1, and FX, as well as more than 140 local cable systems and 420 local broadcast stations.

"Television has sight, sound, and motion, and the ability to target an audience," said Adam Stagliano, president at Brand Architecture International in New York, which created commercials for Pernod Ricard's Chivas Regal Scotch whiskey. "And TV is great for what's called top-of-mind awareness."

Cable television has allowed the liquor industry to reach a large and diverse consumer base quickly and frequently. *JTO Online, 12/17/2003*

...."Be careful what you wish for," said Dr. Jay A. Winsten, a leading opponent of liquor ads on

television who is associate dean at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston and director at its Center for Health Communication.

"While there is not the degree of visibility" for liquor commercials when they are not on broadcast networks, Dr. Winsten said, because the audiences on cable are much smaller, "they're able to pass below the radar to a large degree."

"So it's harder to get a handle on the consequences to public health," he added. "We have no idea the extent to which underage drinkers are being reached or targeted."

By STUART ELLIOTT, NY Times, Dec.15, 2003

Note: According to a recent study by the American Medical Association, "A major source of the normalization of alcohol use by children and youth is alcohol advertising. Television networks and cable stations have profited tremendously from the alcohol industry's aggressive marketing to underage drinkers," it said. "These ads are proven to heavily influence the normalization and glamorization of drinking in the minds of children, and television has continued to endanger the health of these young viewers in spite of such findings."

By Twila Lindblade/Staff writer, The Huntsville Item

Seat Belt Laws are fine, but they do not deal with the root of the problem

Proponents of primary (standard) enforcement seat belt laws justify their actions on the following grounds:

- Failure to buckle up contributes to more fatalities and injuries. Increasing seat belt use saves lives and reduces injuries on America's roadways.
- Children model adult behavior. Adults who don't buckle up are sending children a deadly message that it is all right not to wear a seat belt.
- In order to get young people—the highest-risk drivers—to buckle up, we need stronger seat belt laws and high visibility enforcement campaigns.
- The cost of unbuckled drivers and passengers goes beyond those killed and the loss to their families. We all pay for those who don't buckle up – in higher taxes, higher health care and higher insurance costs.

—Buckle Up America, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

Now, we agree that seat belt laws are benign laws meant for our safety. These laws should exist. But are the advocates for mandatory seat belt laws really concerned about the whole spectrum of

(Over, please)

automobile accidents?

Yes, failure to buckle up contributes to all of the above (deaths, injuries, a bad example to children, higher taxes, higher health care and higher insurance costs), but so does the consumption of alcoholic beverages (the root of the problem). The fact is that alcohol is present in almost half of all traffic fatalities (plus it also impairs the use of seat-belt devices!). Alcohol is certainly not safe for the road!

Why should our efforts to save money and lives concentrate on the consequences of the problem (i.e., traffic accidents), but not on the problem itself (i.e., alcohol consumption)? Why deal only with the fruit of the problem (i.e., car crashes), but not with the root of the problem (i.e., drinking alcohol)?

We need additional laws that will deal with the root of the problem behind many traffic fatalities: the liquor traffic. Self-protection is a nice thing, but accident prevention is even better. Being in the defensive is good, but let's not forget that the best defense is being in the offensive.

So let us continue to compel people to buckle up, but we must not stop there. We must *also* put an end to the liquor traffic, which is filling our world with all kinds of terrible accidents.

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Religion Brings Greater Happiness

...Only spirituality and a sense of purpose bring bliss, says one British researcher.

"It's a timely message, since we do get swamped by our materialistic culture at Christmas," lead researcher Stephen Joseph, PhD, a psychologist with the University of Warwick in England, tells WebMD. "Christmas just amplifies our materialism."

Joseph's study seeks a recipe for happiness, looking beyond religious faith, which other studies have shown is one ingredient. He looks at self-actualization and purpose in life, too.

His study appears in this month's issue of the journal *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*.

In it, Joseph publishes information gleaned from 101 undergraduate students between ages 18 and 49. Each completed surveys that measured their attitudes toward Christianity, whether they felt a purpose in life, and if they had made strides toward that goal.

The surveys also asked their general feelings about life: "I feel dissatisfied with my life. I feel happy. I feel cheerless. I feel pleased with the way I am. I feel life is enjoyable. I feel life is meaningless."

Those scoring high in religious beliefs -- who went to church regularly, had a strong religious faith, and prayed often -- also scored high in happiness and purpose in life.

"We're not saying that all religious people are happier than non-religious people," Joseph tells WebMD. "It's just that, on average, religious people tend to be happier because they have a greater sense of purpose in life."

...Pursuit of happiness should shorten our "give me" list, he says. "Material success, wealth, possessions -- those are detrimental to happiness. More important is valuing our relationships, fostering a sense of community. Religion serves as a vehicle in pointing people in that direction."

People who are not religious but want to celebrate the holidays should focus on connecting with family or with friends they consider to be family, says James H. Bray, PhD, associate

professor of family and community medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"That can be very positive -- you can take time to do nice things for other people, enjoy their company and the support that you give each other," he tells WebMD.

"Also, volunteer work can be a good way to get beyond yourself," Bray says. "Ring the bell for the Salvation Army. I have friends who buy 10 or 20 frozen turkeys, then spend an afternoon driving around in poor neighborhoods and giving them out. Also, I've noticed that a lot of holiday parties encourage bringing toys [to give to charity]. That's a great way to be part of the celebration." *By Jeanie Lerche Davis, WebMD Medical News*

Here is why treatments programs should insist that clients give up all addictive substances (e.g., nicotine and alcohol) simultaneously

People who smoke and try to quit drinking have a more difficult time not relapsing, because new scientific evidence indicates that nicotine may actually cause a craving for alcohol.

If you combine this factor with another new study which indicates that nicotine addiction may be as powerful as an addiction to heroin, smokers who want to stop drinking face an extremely difficult battle indeed.

Although many treatment programs and self-help support groups recommend addressing "one addiction at a time," treatment approaches that insist that clients give up all addictive substances simultaneously may be more effective, according to these new studies.

Led by Toronto's Dr. Dzung Anh Le, a study on rats by Canadian and U.S. scientists has found that nicotine use increases alcohol consumption, and the two addictions may work hand in hand.

The research relevant to humans who drink both excessively and moderately, said Dr. Le. It suggests that to quit drinking, a person might also have to give up smoking as well. "It has a lot of implications for treatment strategy," said Dr. Le, of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. "What we knew before is alcohol and tobacco are extensively co-abused. We wanted to find a biological basis for this co-dependency."

Dr. Ted Boadway of the Ontario Medical Association said although treating dual addictions is already a cornerstone of many therapies, anti-smoking strategies do not always emphasize curbing alcohol intake. Guidelines on stop-smoking approaches usually do not consider the effect alcohol may have on smokers. The study appears in the U.S. journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*

....These new reports provide scientific evidence that those who try to quit drinking, but continue to smoke, face a more difficult problem than those who do not smoke, or who quit smoking and drinking simultaneously. *Alcoholism / Substance Abuse with Buddy T*

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