

## TV eating up family mealtime

HOUSTON--(Oct. 18, 2000)--A generation of "TV-dinner" kids might be learning their eating habits from Homer Simpson, according to a recent survey.

Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine found that more than 42 percent of dinners eaten at home by Houston-area fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders during a one-week survey were consumed while watching television.

"These findings are troubling because family meals are important for children,

from both a nutritional and a developmental standpoint," said Dr. Karen Cullen, a behavioral nutritionist with the USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center. Cullen presented the results of the survey, which involved 287 school children who provided detailed records of what they ate and their food-related behaviors,

at the American Dietetic Association annual meeting in Denver, Oct. 17.

Families that tune into television instead of each other at mealtime also miss important opportunities to talk and connect.

"Parents' table talk can help children to understand their families," Cullen said. "Positive family mealtime conversations can also build children's self-esteem and foster positive relationships that help children and parents talk through tough issues when they arise."

"Family meals play an important role in helping children learn good eating and life skills from their parents," Cullen said. "Parents need to turn off the television during meals and engage their children."

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