

Sharing a meal — sharing our lives

“Mealtime is often the only chance we have of coming together and of sharing, not food alone, but life itself.” — Anne Scott

On the heels of Thanksgiving, I am moved to elevate the importance of sharing meals with others, not just at the holidays but throughout the year.

We at the Senior Center live by this tenet and gladly welcome all persons 60-plus to join us for a meal (for the suggested donation of \$4/meal) any and every day of the year, either at one of our meal sites or, if appropriate, via our Home Delivered Meals Program.

We also welcome friends and family of any age to join us at the Senior Center, on occasion, to share a meal for a modest price. We understand that providing a nutritious and delicious meal once a day is a great way of connecting our community, and we enjoy being a place that makes that happen.

Sharing meals can be especially important in later life when physical, mental and social changes may lessen one's ability to maintain robust eating and exercise habits.

Also, depending on one's accessibility to family and friends, many older adults and elders can become rather iso-

lated in their quieter years.

Sharing meals is a strategy known to increase the amount and variety of food for those who may not eat so well alone. And meals aren't only about the food on the table.

The setting, atmosphere, stories and conversations that accompany the food all contribute to making even the simplest meal memorable. The benefits of eating with others are evident if you ever step into our dining room at the Senior Center.

Still, there are many of you who won't be coming through our doors anytime soon. I urge you to consider sharing meals with family and friends in your lives as well.

There is a body of research that suggests that family meals are positively associated with improving dietary quality, preventing obesity, enhancing language acquisition and academic performance, improving social skills and family unity, and reducing risk-taking



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behaviors.

Sounds like good medicine for all of us in these troubled times, and it's all available at the dining room table nearest you. I know, it's easier said than done, but it is well worth creatively reworking

our meal opportunities to make them family occasions numerous times every week.

It is important to note that family meals can include eating with anyone you love, care for, live with or who cares about you. It is the feeling of sharing and support that comes from being together that makes family meals so valuable.

I had the opportunity this past week while visiting my grown children to see how family meals have, in their world, affectionately become Monday-Potlucks.

They and their roommates have begun having group meals on Mondays,

and they have deepened their appreciation for both a tableful of food and friends as well as the pleasure of developing their own food tradition.

This mom was cheered that good food and socialization, the very things we promote at the Senior Center, are alive and well in the younger generation.

So, maybe you're like me and looking for those simple pleasures in a complex and challenging time. Consider sharing meals more often. Old or young it can be the antidote to isolation and can readily nourish not only our palate, but also our sense of community.

And once again, we welcome you to enjoy a meal at the Senior Center. Your support strengthens our program and our community.

Carolyn Benepe is the community nutrition director involved in the Sheridan Senior Center Nutrition Program, which serves more than 110,000 meals per year to residents throughout Sheridan County.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.