

Supper vs. Dinner



In parts of the US, *supper* and *dinner* are used interchangeably to refer to the evening meal, but elsewhere *dinner* is the midday meal, akin to *lunch*, and *supper*, the evening meal. What do these words really mean?

The word *dinner* does not necessarily imply the time of day. Depending on where you are, it may mean the midday meal or the evening meal, but it always refers to the main meal of the day. The word *dinner* comes from the Vulgar Latin word *disjējūnāre* meaning "to break one's fast."

Supper, on the other hand, is associated with the evening. It comes from the Old French word *souper* meaning "evening meal." It has traditionally been used in the context of the last meal taken by Jesus before his crucifixion, known as the Last Supper.

So if someone asks you over for *dinner*, how do you know what time they expect you? That may depend on where you are. In 1828, Noah Webster wrote that "The dinner of fashionable people would be the *supper* of rustics," reflecting the prominence of *dinner* as the term for a midday meal in some rural parts of the country. Regardless of time of day, if you are going over for *dinner*, you can expect a feast.

More recent data from [Google Ngram](#) suggest that use of the word *supper* has been declining since the beginning of the 1900s, while the use of *lunch* has been increasing. *Dinner* holds the top spot on the lexical food chain as the most widely used term of the three. Which term do you use most often?

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