

GIVING THANKS FOR FAMILY DINNER



Food

Bookmark these Thanksgiving leftover ideas for the day after the feast.



Fun

Break the ice at big family gatherings with this fun group game!



Conversation

Help others get the conversation started this season -- pass on some of our Conversation Shareables!



With Thanksgiving and winter holidays now only weeks away, chances are you're gearing up for more family time -- and more, or bigger, family dinners -- than at any other point during the year. While holiday planning can sometimes bring its own special stresses, it's important not to overlook the main reasons for our gatherings: thankfulness, togetherness, love and connection among them.

If you're finding yourself worn out physically, emotionally or spiritually, and you could use a little motivation to get you into that grateful frame of mind, check out our favorite resources for this most family-centered time of year.

WHY HOLIDAY DINNERS MATTER

The rituals involved in family gatherings are important for our health and well-being. How good? Dr. Anne Fishel and three other family therapy experts explain in this Expert Roundtable.

Among the reasons to gather with family at the holiday table are the stories we tell, which have been shown to foster resilience in children, setting them up for better mental health into adulthood. Read two perspectives on the importance of passing our stories down through the generations -- and tips for doing that at the table -- in Thanksgiving Storytelling and The Food Tells the Story.

For more, visit:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/giving-thanks/

HOW TO PUT THE GIVING INTO THANKSGIVING (AND BEYOND)

Each year, we join #GivingTuesday in proclaiming the Tuesday after Thanksgiving (this year, November 28) an international day of giving! You can use our specialized resources for families to make giving back a central theme of your dinner table on November 28, at Thanksgiving dinner itself, or any day of the year.

Find #GivingTuesday Resources for your Family Dinner Table:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/giving-tuesday/

HOW TO KEEP CIVILITY AND COMMUNICATION ON THE MENU

Tension at the table can be a challenge no matter the time of year, but add in the pressure of a big family gathering, and it can really cause dinner-time anxiety. Make sure your holiday gatherings remain respectful -- and fun! -- with our tips and tools.

Beat Tension and Conflict from the Dinner Table on Thanksgiving, or any day

thefamilydinnerproject.org/beat-tension/

Be Mindful of the Politics of Thanksgiving

thefamilydinnerproject.org/politics-thanksgiving/

Use our Tip Sheets to Keep Conversation Meaningful

thefamilydinnerproject.org/thanksgiving-tips/

Find Dozens of Conversation Starters, Games, Activities and Printables for the Biggest Holiday Dinner of the Year on our Thanksgiving Page

thefamilydinnerproject.org/thanksgiving/

Above all, keep in mind that holiday gatherings should be fun and memorable, not strained and stressful. Do what you can to slow down and focus on the positives!

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE ELDER FAMILY

We recently received the following note in our email: "I am an RDN at Mayo Clinic working in family medicine and pediatrics. I see so many families that struggle with childhood obesity. Several years ago a Family Dinner Project team ventured to Mayo to share your work. I so enjoyed working with the team and share your resources/recommend your site/information to so many of my patients/families." The kind message was from Michaelaen Burroughs, who we remember very well from that Mayo Clinic collaboration back in 2012! We're catching up with Michaelaen and her family now to see where they — and their dinners — are five years later.

THE FAMILY:

Michaelaen and Tracy Burroughs of Byron, MN. Their grown children are Brian, 23, and Regina, 21; Brian was recently married, adding Mariah to the family.

THE GOAL:

As empty-nesters, Michaelaen and Tracy have found that their family dinners have become a bit more casual — maybe too casual for their liking. When they found themselves constantly gravitating to the kitchen counter for meals rather than sitting at the table, Michaelaen noted that it was impacting the quality of their time together. "We find we take more time with each other if we are actually at the table," she says. "Plus at the table we are further away from the computer, which sits on the kitchen counter." They're now trying to intentionally set the table for dinner, enticing them to sit down and make the time to connect.

THE CHALLENGE:

When the kids were living at home, Michaelaen says the challenges were probably familiar to many families: Trying to work around sports schedules and other extracurricular activities to make dinner happen. Now that Brian and Regina have moved out, Michaelaen and Tracy are facing a new type of scheduling challenge: Making sure they both get home from work at a reasonable hour and still have time to make dinner for the two of them.

THE STRATEGIES:

Drawing on many years of experience with family dinners, Michaelaen and Tracy advise meal planning as one of the top ways to make sure that everyone gets together for regular meals. Planning and posting a menu each week helps to make family dinner part of the household organizational system, and can help eliminate the dreaded "What to cook" challenge at the end of a long day. Also, Michaelaen says her top piece of advice for families just starting out with dinners is to make sure to prioritize sitting down together for as many meals as possible from infancy onward, pulling the littlest ones up to the table in high chairs and boosters at breakfast, lunch and dinner so that eating together becomes a lifelong learned habit.

THE FOOD:

The Burroughs family has always relied on simple dinners that get everyone fed with a minimum of fuss. Favorites include tuna noodle casserole, a mixture of beef Rice a Roni and ground beef, crock pot meals like chili and pot roast, and pizza. Michaelaen says they always serve a fruit, vegetable and cottage cheese as dinnertime sides — "an unusual family favorite!"

THE TAKEAWAY:

Michaelaen says she's always appreciated the resources provided by The Family Dinner Project and enjoys providing them to patients at the Mayo Clinic to help them improve their family dinner habits. However, recently she's found new meaning in sharing our tips and tools, as son Brian and his new wife moved 900 miles away from home to pursue new job opportunities. "They send us snaps of their dinners and text with recipe requests and ideas," she says. To help the couple get settled into their new life, Michaelaen sent them links to the Family Starts With Two section of The Family Dinner Project. "I was excited to see this," she says, "because family dinner as a routine BEFORE kids makes it much more likely it will happen once kiddos enter the scene!"



THANKSGIVING LEFTOVER RECIPES

Leftover Lunch Recipe

Got leftovers? No problem! Make good use of your leftovers with this recipe from The Family Dinner Project's Leftover Lunch Recipe Series.

BEAN & CORN SALAD

INGREDIENTS

- 16 oz corn kernels
- 8 oz Monterey Jack cheese, cubed
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1/8 cup white balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 red pepper, chopped (optional)
- 2 tsp. garlic salt
- 1 cup generosity
- 1 (15 oz) can black beans, drained
- 1/2 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped (optional)
- 1 to 2 tsp. white pepper, to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine ingredients in a large bowl and mix. Proportions may be altered as desired.
2. Note: you can use black pepper and regular balsamic vinegar, if you do not have white pepper and white balsamic vinegar on hand!
3. Serve as a side dish, as a burrito or fajita filling, or with tortilla chips while you talk about a time when you helped someone out (i.e. shoveled your neighbor's walkway, gave someone a ride, did something thoughtful without being asked).



For more Thanksgiving Leftover Recipes, visit:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/thanksgiving-leftover-lunches/

THE HAT GAME



This game is especially good for occasions like Thanksgiving, when you may have a number of guests arriving for dinner!

Before dinner, have each dinner guest write their answers to one or more of the following questions on slips of paper and place them in a hat. At dinnertime, the host reads the answers aloud, and everyone tries to guess which guest gave which answers!

- What is a book that transformed your life?
- What character in a children's book did you most identify with as a child?
- What was your favorite toy as a child?
- What do you feel most grateful for?
- What do you love most about being a part of this (or your) family?
- What animal would you most like to be?



CONVERSATION SHAREABLES



CONVERSATION STARTER

If you were free to do
anything you wanted
all day, what would
you do?

THE
FAMILY
DINNER
PROJECT.ORG

For more Conversation Shareables, visit:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation/conversation-starters-shareables/

Scan the QR Code to Sign up for our Email Newsletter

