

# Make Memories with Family Dinner



## Food

Speaking of making memories, try this easy, nostalgic family recipe for Swiss Muesli as an easy make-ahead breakfast, snack or breakfast-for-dinner treat!



## Fun

For a more hands-on way to take a trip down memory lane at the table, try this family tree activity — especially good for larger gatherings.



## Conversation

Planning to honor a mother or mother figure this month? Make it memorable with our special conversation starters.



In a world where we're constantly urged to "make memories" and to "make every moment count," it can be tempting to look around the dinner table and wonder whether what we're doing is enough. Will the kids look back in 20 years and think fondly of the meals we've shared, or will they have forgotten everything except that one epic food fight (in other words, the one meal together you'd rather forget)?

Feeling the pressure to make every forkful of spaghetti Instagram-worthy is understandable, but it's also unnecessary — and could even sabotage your ability to create the kind of family dinner memories you really want. Read on for our thoughts on making memories at the table, and why putting in extra effort to make dinnertime "memorable" may not really be worth the stress.

### **You can't force memories**

Think back to your own childhood. Chances are, like most of us, you were poked, prodded and posed in photo after photo of occasions that were supposed to be memorable and special. But how many photos do you have that show the laughter you shared with siblings in the backseat, playing with friends at the park, sipping cocoa with your grandmother, or any one of hundreds of other unscripted, unremarkable moments that you think back on fondly? The truth is, some of life's best moments happen when nothing special is planned. Relax, let go of any pressure to make things perfect, and just sit down to dinner together. That's where the magic happens!

### **Staying present is key**

Don't let distractions derail dinner. You can't remember what you didn't truly experience, so slow down and focus on listening and being mindful during meals. Don't worry about what chores might be waiting once dinner's done! Instead, try to challenge yourself to notice or learn one new thing about someone at the table each night, to help train your brain to take in all of the good stuff that goes on during dinner when you're really tuned in.

### **Routines and rituals are memorable**

Often, families share with us that the meals they remember most fondly, or the ones their children look forward to the most, are the ones that fall within a predictable family pattern. You could start as simply as holding a theme night each week, like Taco Tuesdays. Or you might try dinner and a movie on Saturdays, pizza and pj Fridays, or Sunday morning pancakes — whatever makes sense for your family and will be easy to stick with. It might seem too simple to be memorable, but all those pizza Fridays and pancake Sundays will add up to a big impression years from now. (As an added bonus, having one day per week where you enjoy a set family meal takes the guesswork out of planning, so what's enjoyable is also what's easiest!)

### **Make memories on their terms**

We found this great idea in *Your Teen Magazine*: Ask teens (and tweens) to teach you how to play their favorite games. Sure, there may be some screen time involved, but add a big plate of healthy snacks that you can munch while playing, and you've got a great opportunity for eating and bonding — no forced "memory-making" required!

## REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE LORENZ FAMILY

Meet the Lorenz family! Dealing with the logistics of raising two boys in travel sports doesn't always make family dinners easy, but Loren and Art are managing to make mealtime a priority.

### The Family:

Loren and Art Lorenz and kids JJ (17) and Brady (9), of Rockledge, Florida.

### The Goal:

The Lorenz family is aiming to increase their time at the table — especially time spent without distractions. Loren says they want to “have real conversations, without electronics or TV interference.”

### The Challenges:

Just getting everyone to the table can be difficult in the Lorenz household, as it is for many families with active kids at home. Finding time to gather all four family members for a meal is a challenge, but also a priority. Loren shares that this spring, it's especially difficult to make time for dinner together, as the boys have baseball 5-6 days a week, and older son JJ is preparing to graduate from high school — a busy and exciting time in the life of any family!

### The Strategies:

For Loren, the solution to making family dinner happen amidst all the competing events on the calendar is to be structured. “Schedule it! Make Sunday dinners important, and be firm about this. No exceptions unless someone is out of town.” Because JJ and Brady play sports and sometimes have travel tournaments, there are times when all members of the Lorenz family can't gather for Sunday dinner, but making it a standing appointment and holding firm makes those scattered days the exception rather than the rule.

The Lorenz family also makes sure to bring the “fun” element to the table whenever possible. Loren says “Anything I can do to get them all together for just a short time is worth the silliness, even for my 17-year-old!” Recently she enticed the family to enjoy snacktime together with a funny “[squirmy cone](#)” snack in honor of Earth Day — a hit with everyone, proving that even teens aren't too cool for family time, especially when there's food involved.

### The Food:

9-year-old Brady is happy to share the unanimous family favorite: “Meatloaf! Awww yeah!”

### The Takeaway:

With time at the table being precious, Loren says she is always eager for any quick and easy tips to help the family connect. One of her strategies is to take screen shots of games and conversation starters from The Family Dinner Project and save them for later, so she can quickly grab a new idea when she needs one.

### The Best Part:

For Art and Loren, connecting with the family at the dinner table means they have structured time to get to know each other in new and deeper ways. Loren says the best part of being together at dinner is finding out something they didn't know about the kids, or hearing stories about events and funny things that have happened in JJ and Brady's lives.

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## SWISS MUESLI

Team member Charlotte shared this recipe with us in honor of her dad. She says, “My paternal grandmother is Swiss, so every few years we got to go to Switzerland, where my dad would eat muesli whenever he could find it. It was always disappointing to him that the muesli you get in the U.S. is dry; his idea of muesli is that it’s hearty and creamy and full of fresh fruit and nuts. Finally we decided to make our own.”

The recipe took on more meaning recently, when Charlotte’s dad was recovering from major surgery and needed to regain his strength. Muesli was one of the foods the family kept stocked during his recovery. “I’m particularly aware, going into this Father’s Day, of how lucky I am that my dad is OK and recovering well, and making this recipe is a way for me to do something that feels useful in what’s otherwise been a bit of a scary and out-of-control time.”



### Ingredients:

Serves 4

- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 4 medium, firm apples, cored (you can peel, but it’s not necessary)
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 cup plain yogurt (regular or Greek style is fine)
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/2 cup sliced or slivered almonds
- 2 cups berries of your choice

### Instructions:

1. Combine oats, raisins and milk in a large bowl. Allow to soak for at least 30 minutes or up to overnight.
2. Coarsely grate the apples with a box grater. Add the lemon juice, yogurt and honey to the apples.
3. Heat a small frying pan over medium heat. Add the almonds and toast for 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly, until golden. Allow to cool.
4. Combine the oat mixture with the apple mixture. Stir in the berries.
5. Top with toasted almonds and serve.



## FAMILY TREE



Take out a piece of paper and map your family's tree. Grandparents can start with their parents, and other family members can fill in the blanks from there. Kids can even decorate the tree with leaves and bark!

*Contributed by The Family Dinner Project Team.*

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/dinner-games/family-tree/>



## TALK ABOUT: MOTHERS AND MOTHER FIGURES



*Use these conversation starters around the dinner table:*

Name three things about your mother — or a mother figure — that you try to model in your own life.

What is your fondest or funniest memory about your mother or mother figure?

If you could plan the ideal Mother's Day celebration, what would you choose to do and why?

Animals are mothers, too! Often moms in the animal kingdom have interesting mothering practices. If you could be, or have, any animal mom, what would you choose?

What's the best advice a mother ever gave you?



# RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

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