

Fall baking season is in full swing. Whether you like it warm or cold, we can all agree that fall brings wonderful flavors with it. One of my favorite fall memories is the cooking being done in the kitchen.

When was the last time you sat down for a meal with your family? Was it last night, last week or last month? For some families, eating together is reserved for special events and holidays, like birthdays or Thanksgiving. These special occasion meals allow families to connect with each other, strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions.

But family meals don't have to be reserved for special occasions. Family meals can happen any time of day, any day of the week! If the words "I'm too busy" pop into your mind, you're not alone.

Benefits of eating together

- **Example**-Dining as a family can create an environment for parents to lead by example for their children.
- **Togetherness**-Adults also report that eating as a family is a positive portion of their day. Mealtime creates a feeling of togetherness
- **Health**-There is an association between family meal frequency and lower rates of obesity
- **Memories**- Taking the time to sit together at mealtime helps create positive memories for yourself and your family.
- **Enjoyment**- The first and most important place where children learn positive attitudes about food is in the home. Eating meals together starts a lasting and positive relationship with food.
- **Self Esteem**- Mealtime conversation brings the family together and promotes positive self-esteem in children.
- **Life skills** -Children learn best by doing, not watching, so get them involved!
- **Traditions**- Mealtime is an ideal time to strengthen family ties and pass on family cultural traditions. Whether you are celebrating a holiday or just eating an everyday meal, things you do in your home will be passed down to your children and grandchildren.

There's a lot to think about and plan for before the big Thanksgiving Day, and it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. The real meaning of the day is thanks + giving — so we're serving up conversation starters, games and activities that will help everyone at your holiday table enjoy a Thanksgiving that's fun and meaningful.

Celebrate the fall weather by getting family or friends together to make Whole Wheat Pumpkin Pancakes.

Whole Wheat Pumpkin Pancakes

Serves:6

1 cup whole wheat flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
1/3 cup pumpkin puree
1 egg
1 tablespoon
2 tablespoons maple or pancake syrup

Directions

Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt together with a fork in a medium bowl.

Beat milk, pumpkin puree, egg, oil, and syrup together in a small bowl.

Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients. Stir until just combined.

Heat a skillet over medium low heat. Spray with nonstick cooking spray.

Pour pancake batter into the skillet using a 1/4 cup measuring cup. Cook until the pancakes have bubbles on the top and the edges are slightly dry, about 3–4 minutes. Flip pancakes and cook for about 2–3 minutes more.