

Family

By Guest Editor
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For many of us family and food are deeply connected. I am sure you can remember a special dish of your grandmother's that always left you with good thoughts and feelings. For me, food has always been an essential way of expressing love and happiness within the family. Nothing gives my mother more pleasure than seeing her children and grandchildren enjoying her home-made delights.

Family life is the fundamental contributor to shaping one's personality. The experiences and relationships we share with our family members have a profound effect on the people we develop into. Security, integrity, strength, responsibility, honesty, respect, flexibility and forgiveness are all valuable attributes gained through constant communication and involvement in the family unit.

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Food plays a major role in a family. It is an indispensable part of life and a key element of socialising. When you think of social gatherings like birthdays, celebrations, picnics and holidays, food is generally the principal focus of bringing families together. In my family, we always commemorate birthdays and personal achievements with a celebratory meal. This has become a tradition and something we all look forward to.

Traditions can be fun and a great way of preserving a sense of security and belonging. They often create a sentimental experience with food. I can vividly recall a childhood memory when we used to make pasta sauce from scratch. My father would grow the tomatoes in our farm each year. With the help of my brother and sisters, we would all spend the entire day working through the many processes involved in preparing the sauce. Firstly, we would place all the tomatoes in between two sheets of clean plastic. We would

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then clean our feet and as a family, dance on top of the tomatoes to squash them. Afterwards, we would separate the flesh from the skin, bottle them and finally sterilise them by boiling. The entire procedure was such a satisfying experience to be involved in, and it made me feel proud of who I was and where I came from.

Food is often associated with great family memories, which can be quite soothing when our loved ones pass away. Keeping family recipes and traditions alive enables us to connect with these emotions when needed. I can fondly remember our annual family visits to country NSW, where we would go cherry picking. Together with my brother and sisters, we would stand around the trees stuffing our faces with cherries in fits of laughter. This still brings a smile to my face.

The fact that my childhood memories always involved food has made me very proud of my heritage and undoubtedly explains my own passion for cooking and healthy eating. I am now quite conscious about keeping this tradition alive in my own family. Even though we all live such hectic lives these days, I occasionally gather my kids in the kitchen and together we all prepare fresh pasta, following a traditional family recipe of my mother's. We mix, knead and roll the pasta out, each one of us taking a turn. Seeing the smiles of gratification on their faces at the finished product is absolutely priceless. Discussing how their grandmother makes it just reinforces our family legacy. This gift of appreciating good food and healthy cooking, that we can pass on from generation to generation, educates our children about their origins. It connects their past to their present, and hopefully shapes their future.

Food customs within families also encourage good eating habits. We are more likely to steer away from packaged products and instead explore the methods our ancestors used to prepare meals from natural, unprocessed ingredients. Now is the time to rethink how we can keep the candle on family traditions alight.

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Unquestionably, in today's modern world, we don't seem to have the hours in the day that the older generation had to prepare meals from scratch. But you can get inspired by pulling out an old recipe from your past and bringing it back to life. You can always create your own version of the dish by adding different flavours, using whole grains, less sugar and fat, or adding extra protein. Resurrecting old family recipes and traditions strengthens your family ties and carries your heritage forward into the future. If you do not have a family tradition, then simply start one yourself. It can be an annual TV picnic dinner or a signature dish that you prepare. It doesn't have to be complex or expensive; just make it represent yourself. Be creative and have fun.

"Eat Healthy, Keep Moving and Believe in Yourself"

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