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## **Have a Family Fun Bake get the family involved in the kitchen**

We all know, or should do, that home cooking is the healthy option. Usually it is left to one person to do the lot – preparation of ingredients, cooking, serving; and quite often washing up. Sometimes, other family members may offer to help, but I know from personal experience that this can be a bit trying. Having to instruct a helper while juggling the rest of the necessary stages of even a simple meal tends to cause tension, especially if the resident chef is only good with multi-tasking when he or she is doing it all on their own. In the past, however, many children were both encouraged and expected to contribute in the kitchen, eventually growing up with sufficient knowledge to become excellent cooks in their own right.

Sadly, that practice seems to have gone by the board these days resulting in many young and not-so-young adults having few culinary skills. Some don't even know how to boil an egg! I would like to change that with my suggestion for a family fun bake.

There are just two of us at home now, and I do most of the cooking while my wife takes on the unenviable task of washing up. She does, however, know how to cook and on occasions prepares the evening meal giving me a break. In some instances, we each have our own specialities; for example: my wife can make great sponges, whereas mine turned out like paving bricks. I can, however, redeem myself with shortcrust pastry, maybe because I'm heavy-handed. If we want to enjoy what we eat, it's a matter of horses for courses.

So, what does this have to do with a fun bake? Well, there are times when we have to prepare a number of different dishes for a particular occasion such as a party; and for one to do it all on his or her own can make for a tiring session. Our simple answer is for both of us to pitch in and do it together. A certain amount of planning is necessary with regard to what we intend to make; then we take on whichever recipes we are best at. Coordination is a must, but with plenty of workspace we rarely get in each other's way and jointly help out when we are at a loose end, perhaps while waiting for something to boil for our specific task. The experience is always a pleasure and extremely satisfying, the atmosphere enhanced by playing one of our favourite CDs.

As I mentioned, we have no children at home now, but while visiting family elsewhere, our fun bake is still a happening appreciated by all. The grandchildren are keen to learn and will give anything a go within reason. I recall a time when our granddaughter wanted to make something and I suggested Hoolie Doolies, a very simple, easy-to-make recipe which you'll find on the website. As it turned out, the usual ingredients weren't available in the pantry at that time; so I said: "No worries, we'll use something else –

what have you got?” We ended up tossing in breakfast cereal and other stuff that seemed like it might work; and so it did. We had no idea how these knock-ups would taste until they were out of the oven. The fact that they were gone in record time thanks to a bunch of opportunistic freeloaders was testament to our combined efforts; and we both had a ball.

I recall times gone by when, as part of the team, baking sessions were productive and generally hilarious; momentarily disappointing, then laughable after the fact. Like my Yorkshire puddings going flat thanks to one of the other roving cooks who didn't know they were in the oven and turned it off. Making punch and brandy butter at Christmas was a classic...

“Doesn't this need more brandy?”

“Okay, and another splash of sherry, I reckon. How's that?”

“Now it's too sloppy.”

“No problem, we'll just put in some more butter and sugar and almond meal.”

Following another tasting – “Better, but we seem to have lost the brandy flavour...”

Needless to say, we ended up with a huge bowl of brandy butter. As for the punch, it was so powerful that we didn't dare let the kids have any.

Yes, it really can be fun having more than one cook, even many cooks in the kitchen at one time. Why not give it a go? Just be prepared for a few spills; and be sure to exercise patience and understanding. And, of course, avoid being too critical. Make it a regular thing and I'm sure it will help improve family relationships. Plus, between you a dish may be created that no-one in the whole wide world has ever had before; and it might even taste good.

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