

11 Playdates Just for Moms

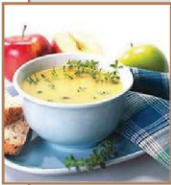


Celebrate the holiday season with a mom's night out • BY CHRISTA MELNYK HINES

You've played entertainer, educator, chief negotiator and vacation coordinator all year long. Kick off the holiday season by taking time to revitalize and reconnect with a mom's night out!

Roasted Apple and Acorn Squash Soup

BY CHEF NED BELL



- 2 apples, unpeeled, cored, cut in half
- 1 medium acorn squash, cut in half
- 2 Tbsp. (30 ml) olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic
- 4 cups (1 L) chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Parsley, optional

Method

1. Preheat oven to 400° F (200° C). Place apples and squash upside down in a shallow pan with ¼ inch of water. Bake for 35 minutes. Remove apples and set aside.
2. Flip squash over. Drizzle with 1 Tbsp. olive oil and a sprinkle of salt. Broil for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. In saucepan, heat remaining olive oil. Add onions and sauté for 5 minutes. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute. Add chicken stock, apple and peeled squash. Bring to a boil. Simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat.
4. Puree in blender to desired consistency. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve topped with freshly chopped parsley.

Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional analysis per serving
Calories: 132; Protein: 4.3 g (13%); Fat: 5.8 g (40%);
Carbohydrate: 17 g (47%). Each serving provides 1½ servings
of vegetables and fruit. Suitable for Diabetic diets.

Chef Ned Bell is one of Canada's foremost culinary talents and homegrown chefs. Visit our website at calgaryschild.com for more of Chef Bell's delicious recipes.

Although we are rarely alone, motherhood can often feel lonely and isolating. Spending time with a few friends to vent, laugh and reenergize in a kid-free zone is healthy and necessary.

"We tend to be able to schedule nap time for toddlers, bath time for babies to help them relax and even make it easy for our partners to hit the basketball court with buddies. But when it comes to us, we forget that we need the same recharging," says Maria Bailey, host of *Mom Talk Radio*, author, talk show host and founder of National Mom's Nite Out.

Whether you have a gaggle of friends or just a few you'd like to know better, here are 11 ideas to fire up some fun:

1. Tap into your inner Matisse. Studies suggest that artistic engagement can reduce stress and anxiety. Many art studios offer instructor-led, one-time classes created specifically for ladies' night out. Feel a pleasant drop in your blood pressure while painting and sipping wine in the company of friends. No clean-up required!

2. Pamper and primp. Schedule manicures and pedicures for you and your friends. Depending on the size of your group, some spas will book an evening just for your party.

3. Welcome wine connoisseurs. Head to an area winery for a relaxing wine tasting or host your own. Choose a group of wines from a specific region, ranging from dry to sweet and hide the names behind a large bow or decorative material. Place a placard with a number in front of each bottle. Give each guest a glass with her own wine charm. Provide scoring sheets for each wine they taste. Serve light appetizers including cheese and crackers, chocolates and palate-cleansing fruits.

4. Coordinate a book swap. Invite your friends to bring gently-used books, cookbooks and magazines they no longer want. Guests can choose as many books to take as they brought to give away. Stephanie Perry, readerslane.com, suggests providing post-it notes so your friends can share their thoughts about a particular book. "As they peruse, guests can write in their own responses, and some interesting 'conversations' can result," she says. For more ideas from Perry, see her post, readerslane.com/articles/book-swap/.

5. Carve out a craft night. Invite your friends to join you for an evening of delving into your favorite crafts or finishing up lingering projects. Turn on some background tunes, include buckets of supplies, share techniques and inspire each other.

6. Host a favorite things party. What's one inexpensive kitchen gadget, make-up product or go-to recipe that you simply can't live without? Share it with your friends! Invite guests to bring five of the items to the party to exchange. Participants take turns explaining why they love a particular product and then gift their items by pulling the names of five friends from a basket. Provide each guest with a complimentary notepad and pen to keep track of ideas or clever tips.

7. Stock the freezer. Help each other prepare for busy school nights with a frozen meal exchange. Each friend should arrive with enough four-person servings for the number of attendees. If five of you participate, each should arrive with five meals. For a simpler exchange, agree on a budget in advance and choose guests who

have similar dietary requirements. Casseroles, lasagnas, marinated meats and soups/stews, like Chef Ned Bell's Roasted Apple and Acorn Squash Soup (sidebar) work well.

8. Plan a cover dish party. "I love this idea because it allows you to have meaningful conversation with other moms and deepen those relationships," says Bailey. Keep the event simple for your friends by requesting that each dish include five ingredients or less. "If you can't find a house without kids in it, then take your covered dishes to a public park or watch the sunset from a picnic table where you can enjoy the outdoors with other moms."

9. Explore local cuisine. Gather your foodie friends around the table and sample area eateries while enjoying great conversation. Take turns choosing one restaurant per month. To build continuity, make the event a standing occasion on the same night each month.

10. Catch the latest flicks. Head to the theatre to watch a movie with your friends. After the film, review together over dinner or dessert. Purse strings tight? Take turns hosting movie-watching parties at your homes.

11. Form a culture club. Experience the fine arts with other friends who share a similar zest for integrating more local culture into their lives. Attend different events every four to six weeks, like jazz concerts, live theatre, the symphony or a museum's latest art exhibit.

Not much of a planner? Invite a few friends over for a hot chocolate by the fireplace. By simply creating time for you and your friends to chat, you will deepen your friendships and nurture your spirit too.

Freelance journalist, Christa looks forward to a mom's night out at least once every six weeks. She is the author of *Confidently Connected: A Mom's Guide to a Satisfying Social Life*. **CCM**

Is it Time for a Tutor? – Continued from previous page

comfortable with their new instructors and whether or not they understand the lessons clearly. Be sure to monitor your child's grades as well. Encouraging and praising your child throughout this process will go a long way as the changes in both their grades and attitude may become immediately apparent. "Notice the successes, even small ones, and speak to them in a positive and matter-of-fact way," says Ridout. "Ask your child to teach you what they have learned, and show them a positive attitude toward learning by studying and reading yourself, discussing ideas and talking about how life is easier and more interesting when you have more knowledge."

Seasoned teachers and educational specialists will agree that once a child has been working with a tutor for a while, the changes are clearly visible, and they will become more confident as they master their subject material.

Following her college journalism professor's advice to "write what you know", Jennifer has specialized in covering pregnancy/family health and lifestyle issues for well over a decade. Her award-winning work has been featured in numerous national/regional publications. **CCM**

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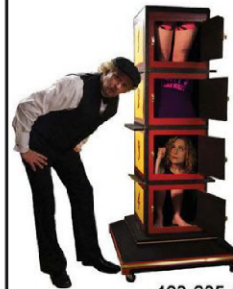
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