



# STEP 3

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EAT REAL FOOD

# STEP 3: EAT REAL FOOD

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### 01 Eat Nutrient-Dense, Whole Foods

In Step 2, you removed the foods from your fridge and pantry that don't serve your specific goals. Now it's time to restock your home with delicious, nutrient-dense foods that will nourish your body, fuel your brain, and boost your energy levels. Real food may cost more pound for pound than processed foods in the short-term, but it is a fabulous long-term investment. The more you invest into sourcing and preparing the right food for your body, the more energy you will have to invest in the activities that give your life meaning. And as the saying goes:

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*"You can pay the farmer now or the doctor later."*

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So what should we eat?

Humans are amazingly adaptable omnivores that can survive and thrive on a wide range of foods. As we talked about in *Step 1*, one size **never** fits all when it comes to nutrition. Depending on the season, your gender, age, ancestry, activity levels, stress load, etc., you might need different quantities of certain macronutrients and micronutrients to feel, look, and perform your best.

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That said, there are some general guidelines we recommend:

- ▶ **Eat whole foods.** As much as possible, try to eat foods in their natural, unprocessed form.
- ▶ **Eat properly raised foods.** How your food is grown or raised is just as important as what you eat.
- ▶ **Eat the most nutrient-dense foods possible.** Not only do they taste better, but they provide fuel and building blocks for every cell in your body.
- ▶ **Eat properly prepared foods.** Cooking can make many nutrients easier to digest and absorb, but be careful not to overcook your food.
- ▶ **Eat with the seasons.** This keeps things interesting and provides your body with the right nutrients at the right time.
- ▶ **Eat locally sourced foods.** Getting foods from local farmers, ranchers, etc. is better for the planet and your body.
- ▶ **Eat enough high-quality fats.** As you will learn in *Step 4*, most fats are actually your friend.
- ▶ **Avoid antinutrients and allergens.** Many foods contain constituents or additives that can be harmful to certain people.

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To keep these in mind, print out the *Foundational Dietary Guidelines* PDF and post it on your fridge.

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Keep in mind, however, that these are suggestions and not rules. When it comes to food, there is no good or bad, only consequences. Some foods will make you feel better, some will make you feel worse. It's completely up to you to decide what works best.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF NUTRITIONAL DEGRADATION

Before we get into more about eating a nutrient-dense, properly prepared, whole foods diet, let's take a brief moment to discuss how we got to today's world of nutrient-poor, processed foods. There are five major milestones that led to the degradation of our food supply: the Agricultural Revolution, the Introduction of Refined Sugar, the Industrial Revolution, The Rise of Big Food, and the Chemical Revolution. Each stage brought both advantages and disadvantages to human health, and it's important to know a bit of what happened in the past to help you make informed decisions *today*.

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### *The Agricultural Revolution*

The Agricultural Revolution marked a major departure from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle that defined the vast majority of human evolution. Approximately 10,000 to 12,000 years ago (a relatively short amount of time in evolutionary terms), people began growing and raising food in one place, instead of following and finding their food wherever it happened to grow or migrate. Agriculture offered many seductive benefits, but it came with a high cost:

- ▶ Fewer nutrients.
- ▶ Less *diverse* nutrients.
- ▶ Habitat loss and soil degradation.
- ▶ Increased spread of communicable diseases.
- ▶ And the creation of societal hierarchies, inequality, and even slavery.

As the ecologist, biologist, anthropologist, and author Jared Diamond puts it:

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*“The adoption of agriculture, supposedly our most decisive step toward a better life, was in many ways a catastrophe from which we have never recovered.”*

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Just like with food, however, it’s important to remember that agriculture is not necessarily good or bad. It is simply a choice that comes with consequences. And there are many ways to do it in a sustainable, equitable way that produces ample quantities of nutrient-dense foods. There is a small but growing number of farmers who are striving to simultaneously work with nature and help feed the world.

As Michael Pollan shares in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, eating is an agricultural, ecological, and political act:

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*“To eat with a fuller consciousness of all that is at stake might sound like a burden, but in practice, few things in life can afford quite as much satisfaction. By comparison, the pleasures of eating industrially, which is to say eating in ignorance, are fleeting.”*

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### *The Introduction of Refined Sugar*

Let's fast forward now to the next major milestone in nutritional degradation: the proliferation of processed sugar. When it was first introduced in the 1600s, processed sugar was a luxury typically enjoyed only by the wealthy. But as production grew cheaper, it began to be consumed by more and more of the population. In just a few hundred years, average sugar consumption went from a few pounds per person, per year, to somewhere between 150 and 200 pounds annually today!

As Gary Taubes shows in *The Case Against Sugar*, sugar is not just harmful because it lacks useful nutrients (as the food and soda industries will argue when they say their sugar-laden products can be part of a healthy diet and lifestyle). In its processed form, sugar has unique biological effects that are harmful to human health, especially in the large quantities that most people now consume. Yes, most chronic diseases today are complex and have multiple causes, but, as Gary argues:

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*“...sugars like sucrose and high-fructose corn syrup are fundamental causes of diabetes and obesity, using the same simple concept of causality that we employ when we say smoking cigarettes causes lung cancer.”*

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### *The Industrial Revolution*

The Industrial Revolution significantly changed how most people live, work, and eat. As more and more people began flocking to cities, and *away* from where food is produced, city dwellers began buying food instead of raising and harvesting their own. And much of what was sold needed to be processed so it wouldn't spoil as quickly when transported from farms to cities. But as shelf life *increased*, nutrient-density *decreased*. It turns out that microbes like to feast on many of the same food constituents that nourish us! As Joel Salatin reminds us:

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*“If it doesn't rot, it's not real food.”*

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The Industrial Revolution *also* rapidly increased the number of people doing all that living, working, and eating. In just the first one hundred years from the dawn of the Industrial Revolution to the mid 1800s, the world population nearly doubled from 700 million to 1.2 billion. It then doubled again in the next 100 years to 2.5 billion, and increased by a factor of 3 in the next 100 years, to today's total of over 7 billion people. That's a lot of hungry mouths to feed!

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### *The Rise of “Big Food”*

Piggybacking on the rise of processed foods, a number of new food companies sprung up in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of which went on to be the very name brands many people now love, *or* love to hate!

Three of the most popular soda brands today, Dr Pepper, Coca-Cola, and Pepsi, were all launched in the 1880s. Fun fact: the original Coca-Cola formula actually contained alcohol and cocaine, both of which were quietly removed in later years, as more and more sugar was added in.

Nestlé, started in 1866 by Henri Nestlé, is now one of the world’s largest food companies by revenue and the 33rd largest public company according to the 2016 edition of the Forbes Global 2000 list.

Kellogg's and Post cereals, for example, were both started in the early 1900s with noble intentions to nourish patients at “sanatoriums” (treatment centers for wealthy people of the day with chronic digestive issues). Kellogg’s was started in 1906 by physician John Harvey Kellogg, who, along with his brother Will Keith Kellogg, discovered a way to transform wheat into a flaked cereal by steaming grains and rolling them into flakes. John was a member of the the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and believed

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that vegetarianism and frequent trips to the bathroom were the paths to good health. Post was started by C.W. Post, a former patient and eventual competitor of John Kellogg, whose Grape Nuts actually became a commercial success years *before* Kellogg's Corn Flakes. Numerous competitors and copycats followed, many of which you can still see on the shelves today.

Though some of these food giants may have begun with good intentions, all are now motivated more by generating profits than nourishing the world. And thanks to the vast fortunes they have earned selling low-cost, profitable, and highly palatable foods, these multinational corporations now have tremendous influence over public policy and research, helping them fight off efforts to demonize their products the way tobacco was in the last half of the 20th century.

### *WWII & The Chemical Revolution*

Of all the milestones we've discussed, the Second World War arguably had the most dramatic affect on our modern food supply. With millions of soldiers spread across the planet, new processing techniques were developed to create rations that were lighter and longer lasting. Many people might not realize that their Goldfish® crackers, granola bars, and juice pouches are actually derived from military inventions in the 40s.

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As nutrient-dense foods like butter and meat were preferentially channeled to troops, civilians were encouraged to consume new-fangled products like margarine and hydrogenated oils. And many never went back even after the war, convinced by flawed studies that these fats were more heart healthy than the natural saturated fats they tried to replace. We'll get more into this in *Step 4: Eat Good Fats*.

In addition to changes in *what* we ate, World War II also led to major changes in *how* food is produced. Many of the chemical compounds originally used to produce bombs and nerve gas, for example, were eventually repurposed for use as fertilizers and pesticides on farms back at home.

The result of all this? We are left with food that is cheap, abundant, highly processed, non-perishable, and covered in chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Some of these industrial foods may satisfy our *taste buds*, but they leave our bodies hungry for nutrients. So what's the solution? It's time for us to heed the wisdom of our ancestors and start eating real food again.

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### EAT REAL FOOD

The NTA is a big believer in the power of “real food,” which we define as nutrient-dense, properly prepared, whole foods. Or perhaps an easier way to define real food is to say what it’s *not*:

- ▶ It’s *not* fast food.
- ▶ It’s *not* highly processed.
- ▶ It’s *not* made in a lab.
- ▶ It’s *not* something you buy pre-made from the freezer section and cook in a microwave.
- ▶ It’s *not* full of toxins, food additives, MSG, artificial sweeteners, etc.
- ▶ It’s *not* treated with growth hormones, steroids, and antibiotics.
- ▶ It’s *not* contaminated with chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- ▶ It’s *not* chemically or genetically altered.
- ▶ And it *doesn’t* last forever. Remember, real food rots!

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Let's now go into more detail about nutrient density and whole versus processed foods.

### *Eat Nutrient-Dense Foods*

You're likely familiar with the **macronutrients** fat, protein, and carbohydrates, but **micronutrients** like vitamins and minerals are equally important for optimal health.

Though vitamins only account for less than 1% of the human body, they play a crucial role in health and growth. They act as coenzymes (or "helpers") in metabolic processes, they support tissue growth, digestion, elimination, and immune function, and they prevent diseases of deficiency like scurvy, pellagra, and rickets.

The importance of minerals cannot be understated. To survive and thrive, we need 7 macrominerals (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium, potassium, chloride, and sulfur) and numerous microminerals (also known as *trace minerals*) including chromium, copper, iodine, iron, manganese, molybdenum, selenium, and zinc. Minerals perform lots of important jobs in the body, from regulating the proper pH of our blood, to building strong bones and teeth, to helping nutrients get into our cells, to acting as spark plugs for nearly every metabolic process in the body.

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To make sure you get ample quantities and diverse kinds of micronutrients, try to find foods with the highest nutrient density possible. A good trick is to look for the brightest, richest colors, as this often equates to higher nutrient density. For example, butter from grass-fed cows and eggs from pasture-raised chickens both tend to have richer colors thanks to their superior nutrient content.

A good trick to eat more diverse micronutrients is to try and get at least 5 colors on your plate. Certain colors are associated with specific nutrients, so the more colors, the better. For example, leafy greens get their pigment from health-promoting *chlorophyll*, while red cabbage gets its rich color from the antioxidant *anthocyanin*.

So next time you are deciding what to eat, instead of asking yourself:

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*“How many calories is this?”*

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Instead ask yourself:

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*“How nutrient-dense is it?”*

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### *Eat Whole Foods*

Try to eat foods in their whole, natural form whenever possible. This helps ensure maximum nutrient density, variety, and even flavor. Some people disagree on what counts as a “whole food,” but at the NTA, we define them simply as unprocessed and unrefined plant or animal foods that are still easily recognizable. Common examples include vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and raw milk. For example, an ear of corn is a whole food. High-fructose corn syrup is not.

Unprocessed whole grains and legumes can also be considered whole foods, but they should only be consumed if well tolerated and properly prepared (for example, soaked and sprouted).



See the *Soaking & Sprouting Guide* PDF for detailed instructions on how to properly prepare grains & legumes.

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And to be fair, there are also some minimally processed foods that are certainly nutritious and worth experimenting with such as butter, coconut oil, raw cheese, etc. The key here is that they are not highly processed, contain minimal ingredients, and have nourished our ancestors for generations.



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And speaking of our ancestors, an easy trick to check if something is a whole or highly processed food is to ask yourself:

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*“Would my great-great-grandparents recognize this as food?”*

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As Michael Pollan puts it:

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*“There are a great many food-like items in the supermarket your ancestors wouldn’t recognize as food... stay away from these!”*

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So next time you are shopping for food to nourish you and your family, skip the Goldfish® crackers and have wild-caught fish instead. Eat some pasture-raised eggs and skip the Cadbury variety.

### *Eat Properly Sourced and Prepared Foods*

*Where* you source your food and *how* you prepare it are arguably just as important as what you decide to eat. We will go into much more detail on both of these important factors in the next two sections.

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See the *Food Sourcing Guide* and *Good, Better, Best Shopping Guide* PDFs for food shopping tips and resources.

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### 02 Source Your Food from Healthy Plants & Animals

The key takeaway here is that *where* you source your food is just as important as *what* you eat. Many people spend lots of time and energy thinking about what they put in *their* mouths but give little thought to what nourished the plants and animals they are consuming. You will often hear the phrase:

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*“You are what you eat.”*

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There’s definitely truth to that. But when it comes to nourishing your body and maintaining the environment, it’s important to remember that you are also what you eat *eats*.

### INDUSTRIAL VS. SUSTAINABLE FARMING

As we discussed in the last video, industrialization significantly changed the nutritional quality of our food supply. Not only did we begin consuming more sugar and processed foods, but we also changed the nutrient-density and health of the original plants and animals these foods are made from as industrial farming replaced more natural, sustainable food production methods.

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### *Is Vegetarianism the Answer?*

A number of books and documentaries in recent years have exposed the consequences of industrial farming, especially concerning how animals like cows and chickens are raised. Worried about the supposed negative health effects of animal products, disgusted by the treatment of animals, and concerned about the future of the planet, many people have turned to vegetarianism or veganism, believing these eating habits to be healthier, more humane, and more sustainable.

Yes, modern, industrial farm practices are certainly not the ideal way to feed or protect the world. But whether or not to consume animal products is often painted as a black and white issue, when the truth is much more nuanced. The choice is not just between eating factory farmed meat and being a vegan.

This false dichotomy ignores the many health benefits of properly raised animal products and the hard work of innovative farmers like Joel Salatin. On his farm in Virginia, and many just like it all over the world, people have figured out how to mimic nature to produce healthy animals *and* sustainable ecosystems. It turns out that with some creativity, humility, and hard work, we can both nourish the world *and* heal the land.

And as Michael Pollan puts it in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*:

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*“Killing animals is probably unavoidable no matter what we choose to eat. If America was suddenly to adopt a strictly vegetarian diet, it isn’t at all clear that the total number of animals killed each year would necessarily decline, since to feed everyone animal pasture and rangeland would have to give way to more intensively cultivated row crops. If our goal is to kill as few animals as possible people should probably try to eat the largest possible animal that can live on the least cultivated land: grass-finished steaks for everyone.”*

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For more on the many unseen downsides of vegetarianism, read *[The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability](#)*.

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### *Sick Animals, Sick People, Sick World*

Not only is there a big difference in the nutrition of meat from animals raised in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (or CAFOs) versus those raised on pasture, but there is also an important distinction with regard to sustainability. Feeding cows corn in confined feedlots, for example, creates the same biological-environmental mismatch faced by many people today. The poor diet and environment of cows (and humans!) leads to

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sick animals, so they're pumped full of antibiotics. The antibiotics work to keep the sick animals alive, but they also help fatten them up more quickly (one of the off-label uses of antibiotics in industrial farming).

### *There's a Better Way*

But it doesn't have to be this way! When cows are allowed to graze naturally on grass (the food they evolved to eat), they tend to be far healthier and happier animals, which in turn produce healthier meat and milk for those who choose to consume it.

Natural food chains, evolved over millions of years, are far healthier for our bodies, the planet, and the economy than the industrial food chains that have sprung up to replace them in the last century. Not only is eating properly raised animals good for us (humans evolved to eat meat and there are nutrients like B<sub>12</sub> we need to survive and thrive that can only be found in animal products), but it is also good for the planet itself. Ruminant animals such as cows, sheep, bison, etc. convert sun energy (a clean, free, virtually endless fuel source) into nutrient-dense protein and fat. And while doing so, they help fertilize grasslands with their manure, create ideal seed germination pools when their hoofprints fill with water, and help keep grasslands *grasslands*. Without these animals grazing upon them, many grasslands would actually become deserts!

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Some have argued that it is more efficient calorically to raise crops instead of cattle since a significant amount of food energy is lost when one animal eats another (9 calories for every 1 we eat). But the reality is that many grazing lands could not easily be used for row crops anyway without pumping in outside water and using synthetic fertilizers. And even for land that can be used to grow crops, far more more nutrients are produced per acre when ruminants eat grass on well-managed pasture than on an acre of farmed grain.

### *It's Your Choice*

Optimal human health requires at least *some* fats and proteins from animals. You don't have to consume massive quantities of meat, but we *do* highly recommend eating at least some wild-caught fish, pasture-raised eggs, and raw, grass-fed dairy products (if you tolerate them) to ensure that you get the bioavailable forms of protein, fat, minerals, and vitamins you need to feel and perform your best. Plants *do* contain various quantities of protein, fat, minerals, and vitamins, too, and we encourage you to eat the rainbow of vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds. But keep in mind that the form of nutrients found in plant foods is often more difficult to digest, assimilate, and convert into the forms you can use in your cells.

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People become vegetarians and vegans for many reasons, and we are not going to debate the ethical implications of eating animals here. As we've talked about earlier in the course, when it comes to food, there is no right or wrong, only consequences. But when it comes to avoiding animal products, there *are* consequences to your health and even the planet, and we think it's important you know what they are before making up your mind. It's then up to *you* to decide if the consequences are worth it.

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For more about industrial farming, reading Scientific American's article [3 Big Myths about Modern Agriculture](#).

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## HOW TO IDENTIFY PROPERLY RAISED FOOD

There are lots of words now used in the marketplace to describe how particular foods are raised, and it can be difficult to know what's what. Here are a few of the most common terms to look out for and what they actually mean.

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See the *Food Quality Guide* PDF for more tips on deciphering food label terms.

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### *Grass-Fed vs. Pasture-Raised*

When ruminant animals like beef, lamb, buffalo, bison, and goat are labelled “grass-fed,” it means that they have been fed grass for at least *some* of their lives. This is in stark contrast to animals raised exclusively on feedlots, where they are raised on corn, grains, and commercial feed, none of which they are evolved to eat. That said, the term is not tightly regulated, and even “grass-fed” animals can actually be *finished* on grains for the last few months before they come to market. To ensure that an animal has only eaten grass as nature intended, look for meats labeled “Grass-Fed, Grass-Finished” or “100% Grass-Fed.”

This is important because animals fed exclusively grass live healthier lives, and produce healthier food. 100% grass-fed beef, for example, has a much more favorable ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats than those raised on corn, grains, etc. We’ll talk more about the importance of this ratio in *Step 4: Eat Good Fats*.

“Pasture-raised” or “pastured” animals spend most of their time outside, meaning they often have access to their natural diets: grass for cows, insects for chickens, etc. But some pasture-raised animals *may* be fed grains, too, especially in the winter when the pasture is covered with snow.

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The key here is that pasture-raised refers more to *where* an animal eats, while grass-fed refers to *what*.

Want to know exactly how your food was raised and what they ate? Your best bet is to get to know your local farmers or ranchers. It creates a more visceral connection with your food, shows respect for those who grow it, and allows you to ask questions directly. When talking with farmers and ranchers, please be respectful and suspend judgement. These heroes work really hard to balance the welfare of their animals and the economic realities of the modern world.

### *Cage-Free vs. Free-Range Poultry & Eggs*

You will often see poultry and eggs labeled as “cage-free” or “free-range.” So what’s the difference? And why should you care? As the name implies, “cage-free” means that animals are not confined to cages. While this is certainly better for *their* lives and *our* bodies than confinement, this is not actually a very meaningful term. Cage-free animals still live their lives in tight quarters, away from sunlight, fresh air, and their natural diets.

Similar to cage-free poultry, their “free-range” counterparts live most of their lives indoors. The key difference is that free-range animals have *access* to the outdoors, while cage-free animals do not. The problem with this term is that you have no way to know

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how much time the animals actually spend outdoors (often little to none), and whether the outdoor space is on grassy pasture, dirt, or even concrete!

From a nutrition and animal welfare point of view, pasture-raised poultry and eggs are the best choice. But just as we said earlier, the key is befriending farmers so you can know firsthand how the animals are raised and what they are fed.

### *Humane Certifications*

In recent years, a number of new certifications have been developed to help consumers choose animal products that have been raised humanely.

The most rigorous such certification is *Animal Welfare Approved*, which certifies that meat, eggs, and dairy products come from animals raised outside in their natural habitats.

Other certifications include *Global Animal Partnership*, which has 5 levels (5 being the best), and *Certified Humane*, which certifies that animals are never confined to cages, crates, or stalls, and are provided the means to express their natural behaviors, may it be perching for chickens or rooting for pigs.

But again, no label or certification can replace a direct relationship with a farmer or rancher.

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See the list of questions in the “Local Farms & Ranches” section of the *Food Sourcing Guide* PDF.

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### *Wild-Caught vs. Farm-Raised Seafood*

When buying fish and seafood, the most important word to look for is “wild-caught.” This term means that the sea creature you are buying grew up in its natural habitat, eating the foods it evolved to consume. “Farm raised” seafood, on the other hand, is produced in small enclosures and fed unnatural diets, both of which can increase disease, leading many producers to use antibiotics (something you don’t want in your seafood or your gut).

Regardless of which type you choose, try to eat smaller fish that are lower on the food chain like sardines, salmon, and tilapia, and shellfish like oysters and clams. This is because, sadly, many of the toxins now in our oceans *bioaccumulate* (or build up) in larger, predatory fish like tuna, shark, swordfish, and marlin.

### *Organic vs. Conventional*

One of the most common words you will see at the store is “organic.” But exactly what does this mean? Different countries have different regulations around the term, but in the United States, the “certified organic” label is only given to farmers who

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undergo annual audits to ensure they meet the following federal standards:

- ▶ No synthetic fertilizers or pesticides.
- ▶ No antibiotics or hormones.
- ▶ No GMOs.

It's important to understand that “organic” produce is usually raised with fertilizers and pesticides, too. The difference is that conventional produce relies on *synthetic* chemicals, while organic produce makes use of less processed versions created from natural sources such as plant and animal waste. Regardless of whether you buy organic or conventional produce, we recommend washing your produce before eating it. If you *do* buy conventional produce, try to avoid what the Environmental Working Group calls the “Dirty Dozen,” specific fruits and vegetables that tend to have the most pesticide residues: strawberries, spinach, nectarines, apples, peaches, pears, cherries, grapes, celery, tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, and potatoes.



See the *The Clean Fifteen & The Dirty Dozen* PDF in the resources.

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Organic animal products are raised using only organic feed, including organic grasses *or* grains. The term “organic” alone, therefore, does not specify whether a given animal is grain-fed, grass-fed, or pasture-raised.

If it makes sense for you and your family, buying organic is usually a good investment (especially for animal foods and produce with edible skins). But please keep in mind that many smaller farmers may in fact *follow* organic practices to the letter (or sometimes even go far beyond the minimum requirements), but simply cannot afford the money and time required for organic certification. As mentioned above, get to know your farmer and find out for *yourself* how they produce food, instead of just relying on potentially misleading terms and labels.

### *Local*

There is no official definition of “local” when it comes to food, but most people tend to consider foods as “local” if they are grown within 100 miles or 160 kilometers of where they are purchased or consumed. Eating locally produced food has many ecological, economical, and nutritional benefits:

- ▶ Less fuel is required to transport the food.

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- ▶ Food can be picked when it is ripe and full of both flavor and nutrients, instead of being picked early so that it ripens by the time it arrives at its final destination.
- ▶ By default, eating locally means you are eating with the seasons.
- ▶ Buying local food supports your community, and helps create a direct connection with the individuals who grow it.
- ▶ And local food production is safer, less fragile, and more transparent.

As Joel Salatin says:

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*“The shorter the chain between raw food and fork, the fresher it is and the more transparent the system is.”*

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### *Natural*

When it comes to food, the term “natural” is so overused and poorly defined that you can safely ignore it. Typically, natural foods are minimally processed and lack artificial ingredients or preservatives (which is good), but can still contain antibiotics, growth hormones, and MSG (which is *not* so good).

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### WHERE TO BUY PROPERLY RAISED FOOD

Last but not least, let's talk about where to buy nutrient-dense, properly raised food. We have four suggestions for you.

#### *Buy From Trusted Local Farmers & Ranchers*

We've already talked about the importance of getting to know where your food comes from, and buying from local producers you trust is hands down the easiest way to do just that. So where should you start? The easiest and most enjoyable way to meet local farmers and ranchers is to attend nearby farmers markets. More are popping up all the time, and chances are that there is one or more weekly farmers market near you. Just enter the name of your city, town, or region in Google, and add "farmers market".

Another fun option is to schedule a farm or ranch tour. You can make it a weekend adventure for the whole family! Just make sure to wear shoes and clothes you don't mind getting dirty.

But if you don't happen to live near any farmers or farmers markets, not to worry; there are three other options to get properly raised plants and animals onto your plate.



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### *Get a CSA Box*

“CSA” stands for “Community Supported Agriculture,” a convenient system that delivers boxes of fresh, locally produced food right to your doorstep or to local pickup points. Most CSA boxes include different items each week and some even allow you to customize what’s included. This is an excellent way to eat seasonally *and* provide some novelty for your taste buds each week.

### *Visit Local Grocery Stores & Co-Ops*

If it’s easier for your schedule and lifestyle to shop at grocery stores or co-ops, that works, too. When possible, opt for smaller, local stores instead of nationwide chains, as the former tends to mirror the nutritional, economical, and environmental benefits of local food we previously discussed. Regardless of where you shop, be intentional and vigilant about what you put in your cart.

### *Buy Online*

If all else fails, you can always buy foods online from sites like Thrive Market, Butcher Box, U.S. Wellness Meats, Amazon, etc. There *are* some ethical and ecological implications of buying online, especially when food is shipped great distances, but let’s not let perfection be the enemy of the good here. Regardless of

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where it comes from, we'd much rather you eat real foods that serve you than processed foods that don't.

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See the *Food Sourcing Guide* and *Good, Better, Best Shopping Guide* PDFs for more food shopping tips and resources.

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You are now armed with the information you need to source properly raised food that will nourish you and your family. And knowing is half the battle. The next hurdle for many is figuring out how to actually cook and prepare real food. That's where the next video comes in. You will learn some tips and tricks that will minimize your time in the kitchen and maximize the nutrition on your plate.

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### 03 Prepare Your Food Properly

#### THE KEY TO COOKING IS PLANNING

Don't think that you need to start making super fancy dishes with flames flying out of them like you see in the movies, or that you need to make dishes with dozens of unfamiliar ingredients. One of my favorite quotes is from Julia Child:

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*“You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces—just good food from fresh ingredients.”*

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You don't have to be a chef with fancy equipment or exotic ingredients to be able to cook good food, and it doesn't need to take up many hours of your time. What we're going to focus on here is cooking food that is healthy, simple, and tasty, with tools you might already have in your kitchen or can acquire easily. We'll use foods that are easy to find at your local grocery store or health food store. And, we'll show you how to do it while also working around your busy schedule. Cooking can seem scary at first when it's unfamiliar, but we are going to give you great tips to walk you through how to prepare and cook delicious, healthy food in a way

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that is actually fun, and hopefully inspire you enough to discover your own inner chef. Making properly-prepared, nutrient dense food can take a little more time than you are accustomed to spending at first, but it doesn't have to be many hours each day. With a little foresight and habit building, you can get all your cooking for one week done in just a couple of hours.

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See the *Meal Plan* PDF for a sample weekly meal plan based on recipes in the Foundational Wellness Cookbook.

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### WEEKLY FOOD PREP

The key to healthy cooking is doing most of the prep beforehand. We promise that you won't have to spend hours for each meal in cook and clean time. One big weekly shop followed by a few hours of cooking on Sunday each week can save you hours of time throughout the week. By preparing much of the food ahead of time, you can get home and have dinner on the table shortly by assembling previously made items with those prepared that evening. We're going to show you how to take some of the heavy lifting off your daily to do list so that cooking during the week is

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as painless as possible and a fun and creative exercise you can even enjoy!

### *Step 1: Plan*

Planning is the key to meal prep.

First, think about your goals with meal prepping. Why are you doing this and what do you want to get out of it? Write it down and stick it on your fridge to remember for the times when you inevitably don't want to meal prep. It happens to all of us!

Second, calculate how many meals you will need for you and your family, and what kinds. Most likely, you will want lunches for work and school that are fully prepared and don't require any cooking other than possibly re-heating. Dinners can be cooked right before serving by cooking already cut up veggies in some fat and adding an already-cooked protein just long enough to heat it through.

Third, decide on your meals for the week. Remember, this doesn't have to be complicated. Just think in terms of a template of proteins, fats, veggies, and flavor boosts. We'll talk about all of these more in just a bit.



Use the blank template provided in the *Meal Plan* PDF to create your own personalized meal plan.

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### *Step 2: Shop*

Now, it's time to shop for your ingredients. Your local grocery store or natural foods market is a good place to start. Farmer's markets are wonderful for finding fresh ingredients. You can also look into getting a delivery of a weekly CSA box. CSA stands for *Community Supported Agriculture*. It's sort of like a farmer's market that comes to you. The fun thing about a CSA is that the contents are a surprise and they are what is in season, so you're less likely to get bored with the same foods over and over. Plus, you'll get to try some foods that you haven't had before or have never even heard of!



Please see the *Food Sourcing Guide* for more about finding a CSA box provider.



See Mira Dessy's *Pantry Principle Provision List* PDF for a list of nutrient-dense ingredients to have on hand.

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Many people find it easiest to do their planning and shopping on Friday or Saturday and then their cooking on Sunday. You can do

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it however you like and with whatever fits into your schedule. However, doing it all in one day might be a little overwhelming, especially when you're just getting started, so we recommend you keep the shopping and prepping on two separate, consecutive days when you're just starting out.

Now that you're getting rid of a bunch of refined foods, you are going to be eating a lot more protein, veggies, and fats than you were before. Be prepared for most of the volume of your fridge being taken up by vegetables, not just the single vegetable drawer that was a haven for dying greens before. Plan accordingly, and make space in your fridge *before* you shop. This will help you take stock of what you have to use before buying more.

### *Step 3: Prep*

Now that you've bought and organized your ingredients, it's time to prepare them. By doing 90% of the work in this "prep" phase, it makes it much quicker to do the actual "cook" phase when it's time for dinner, plus cleanup is a breeze. The first, and arguably most important step of prep, is *mise en place*, a French phrase meaning "putting in place." If you are working off recipes, you'll want to read them through thoroughly once. Then, read them through again, taking out all the ingredients and equipment you will need for the first recipe. If you are inspired by a recipe or idea, but

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adding your own twist, it is good practice to mentally review the steps, and get your ingredients and tools *en place* as well.

We like to start with preparing meats, and then move on to vegetables, but you can do it however you like. Next, consider if you want to season or marinate something in advance, which often enhances the depth of flavor. It may seem excessive, but I assure you that having forethought now will be oh-so-nice. If you can commit to a vague protein plan for the next two days, each day, your future self will thank you, and you will be likely to stick with your set intentions. For example, Monday evening, you defrost pasture raised ground beef for Tuesday to top spaghetti squash, and dry rub organic chicken thighs with your favorite seasoning blend.

It is so much easier to prepare meals when you have veggies that are already washed and cut because there's no mess and you can have options. It's easy to throw them on top of a salad with your prep-planned protein, and add a healthy plated fat for an easy satisfying meal. These prepped vegetables can easily be tossed into a stir-fry, or eaten as a snack. Plus, you'll be more likely to eat your vegetables when they are already prepared.

If you decide you are going to eat grains or legumes, you need to make sure they are properly prepared by soaking, sprouting, or fermenting them to reduce the antinutrients. It's a good idea to get



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in the habit of soaking or sprouting something at any given time, keeping a sprouting lid in a constant rotation, varying often. If you're on a budget, using sprouted lentils 1 for 1 with ground beef is a great way to “stretch” the ground beef while still adding a little protein. However, it does take some “babysitting” to do sprouts, so wait until you've gotten into a groove of regular weekly meal prepping before you add this in to your rotation. Many people find it easiest to eliminate grains and legumes altogether, and you will do just fine if you decide this is what you want to do, too.



See the *Soaking & Sprouting Guide* PDF for detailed instructions on how to properly prepare grains & legumes.

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### *Step 4: Store*

The temperature of your fridge varies from shelf to shelf, so you'll want to store food accordingly. The warmest spaces are in the doors, the next warmest are the top shelves, and the coldest spaces are on the bottom shelves. Condiments can go in the doors. The top shelves are good for already prepared food such as cooked meats and cleaned and cut vegetables, plus fresh herbs. To prevent oxidation, it's also a good idea to store nut butters, nuts, nut flours, and delicate oils like flax or sesame seed oil in the fridge. These

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can go on one of the top shelves, too. Store raw meat, eggs, and dairy in the bottom shelves, not in the doors. Keep raw or defrosting meat in a bowl or shallow dish to catch any leaks—always on the bottom shelf. Whole fruit can go in the fruit drawer, and vegetables in the vegetable drawer. You'll want to keep these separate since one lets in the humidity and one does not. In the freezer, you can store homemade bone broth, frozen fruits and vegetables, meat, and extra made-ahead meals for those nights where you don't feel like cooking. Foods that don't have to be refrigerated while they are still whole are citrus fruit, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, onion, and squash. These can go in a bowl on the counter, adding color to your kitchen.

Here's a pro tip: keep that shallow dish for raw meat in the fridge as a visual reminder to defrost something at all times. Because you are hopefully buying high quality protein when it is on sale, in season, or readily available from a local farmer or co-op, you'll have a freezer full of food! Treat it properly by allowing it to properly defrost.

Here's another pro tip to avoid wastage and apply the rule of "First In, First Out": keep an "Eat Me First" box in the fridge where you can place the foods that are either close to expiring or getting a little long in the tooth, like vegetables that are just starting to wilt. You and your family will know to reach for those foods first before the newer foods so nothing goes to waste. You can find clear

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acrylic containers at homewares stores that work perfectly for this task. They even have some that are specifically designed for fridges. Adding a pretty label will make the box nice to look at every time you open the fridge door.



See the *Fridge Storage Guide* PDF in the resources for more refrigerator storage tips.

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### *Step 5: Cook*

When it's finally time to cook dinner, since you've already done a large majority of the work beforehand, it will take minimal time and effort to cook and clean. We're going to apply our template here of protein, fats, vegetables, and flavor boosts (spices, herbs, acids, etc). Choose one protein, one fat, one to two vegetables, and a flavor booster.

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*1 Protein + 1 Fat + 1 or 2 Vegetables + 1 Flavor Booster*

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Here are three examples of how it could work:

- ▶ Cooked and diced chicken thighs + ghee + lightly steamed broccoli + salt & pepper
- ▶ Browned ground pork + chopped bacon + shredded cabbage + sliced green apple + sausage seasoning
- ▶ Salmon + butter + baked sweet potato + asparagus + lemon juice

For the first example, you could heat up your cast iron pan with a tablespoon of ghee, toss in the steamed broccoli and diced chicken thighs until they are all heated through, and then season with salt and pepper to taste. Time taken: only the time to heat it all through, plus 5 minutes for cleanup.



See the *Foundational Wellness Cookbook, Foundational Cooking Techniques & Foundational Cooking Tools*.

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### BASIC INGREDIENTS

#### *Proteins*

Some example proteins are grass-fed ground beef, pork, meatballs, chicken, turkey, salmon, tuna, sardines, or eggs. Just remember to source from healthy sources, as we discussed in the last section.

#### *Fats*

We will discuss fats in much more detail in *Step 4: Eat Good Fats*, but for now, know that butter, ghee, bacon fat, coconut oil, extra virgin olive oil, lard, tallow, duck fat, avocado, and olives are *all* healthy fats, contrary to what you might have heard.



See the *Healthy Fats Guide* for a list of which fats to eat, which to cook with, and which to avoid.

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#### *Vegetables*

For veggies, ideally, make whatever is in season, but some easy vegetables to start with might be broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, kale, Brussels sprouts, or sweet potatoes. This is a great

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opportunity to incorporate 1 or 2 new vegetables a week to add color and variety, and to discover a new family favorite!

### *Flavor Boosters*

Flavor boosters could be as simple as salt and pepper, fresh herbs, spice blends, or a squeeze of fresh lemon juice—something to give the meal some pizzazz and make it fun.

Salt is probably the most important flavor booster. You'll want a good quality sea salt, and it's a good idea to keep a pinch bowl of salt by the stovetop for easy access while you're cooking. Many people are afraid of salt because of the effects of salty processed food on blood pressure, but it's really the processed food that is to blame, not the salt! A good thing to remember is:

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You can eat as much salt as you want, as long as *you* are the person to salt it.

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This simple guideline helps eliminate a lot of processed foods.

Spices are another flavor booster. Spices can seem intimidating if you're not familiar with them, but you don't have to buy gazillions of fancy, expensive spices or learn everything about how to use

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them. Salt and pepper are just fine to start. In fact, it's amazing how something so simple could make food taste so delicious. However, there are a few staple flavor boosters in the form of spices, herbs, salts, or acids that can elevate food to something incredible. Simple combinations of spices or herbs can transform dishes into various international cuisines such as Mexican, Italian, Eastern European, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Indian, East Asian, etc. You can travel the world from your bowl, and trying out new flavor combinations is a perfect way to keep foods novel and interesting. See the spices chart in the resources section for some basic flavor combinations you can try.



See *Easy Homemade Spice Blends* in the *Foundational Wellness Cookbook* for 8 delicious blends you can make at home.

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Acids like vinegar or lemon juice are, in our opinion, the most magical flavor booster. Think of using them in the same way that you would use salt, for adding another dimension of flavor. Usually, when something is missing from a dish, but you can't quite put your finger on what it is, it needs some acid. Think roasted, caramelized Brussels sprouts fresh out of the oven with a sprinkle of flaky sea salt and a squeeze of fresh lemon drizzled over the top. It's like nothing else!

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Fruit is an optional flavor booster. We're listing fruit as a flavor booster because it can add some zing and flavor to a dish, like dried cranberries or pomegranate seeds in a salad, or a splash of orange juice in a marinade, but we don't want it to be a main component of a dish, lest it feed the sugar dragon. Fruit should be used sparingly, as a condiment.

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See Mira Dessy's *Pantry Principle Provision List* PDF for a list of nutrient-dense ingredients to have on hand.

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## ESSENTIAL KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

Just like you don't need dozens of fancy ingredients to make a good dinner, you also don't need dozens of specialized gadgets for the kitchen. You just need a few essentials. There are lots of tools that are fun to have and make the process of cooking faster, and more convenient, but they certainly aren't necessary. Start with the basics, and then buy as needs arise once you start cooking more complex and varied dishes.



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### *Cutting & Blending*

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See the *Foundational Cooking Tools* PDF in the resources for more tips and suggested brands.

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- ▶ Get a good **knife** that feels comfortable in your hand and is extremely sharp. It seems counterintuitive, but a dull knife is more dangerous than a sharp one, since it's more prone to slipping, and slipping is when injuries happen.
- ▶ You'll need a heavy **cutting board**, preferably wood. If you wish, you can place a towel under your cutting board so it doesn't slide around. Only place dry items on the cutting board so they don't slip. If cutting meat or fish, blot it dry first with paper towels.
- ▶ A **food processor** and **high-powered blender** can be helpful and are two of our favorite kitchen tools, but they aren't necessary when you're just starting out.

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### *Cooking*

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See the *Foundational Cooking Tools* PDF in the resources for more tips and suggested brands.

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- ▶ Get a **large pan** for sautéing, either ceramic-coated or cast iron. We already discussed cookware in *Step 2: Design Your Environment*, but we want to mention it again now given how important it is: whenever possible, avoid using any cookware made of aluminum or coated in Teflon™. We want to avoid adding toxins to the high-quality food we just spent our hard-earned money on. Don't worry about losing the convenience of the non-stick surface: ceramic coated cookware works as well as pans with non-stick coating, and cooking with sufficient fat will help, too. Make sure you grab pot and pan handles from underneath instead of from above so you have better control.
- ▶ A **pressure cooker** is an optional—but extremely convenient addition—to your kitchen. They are extremely versatile, multi-function tools that take the place of multiple pieces of kitchen equipment, including a slow cooker and rice cooker.

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They allow you to quickly make broths, soups, pulled meats, rice, etc., but can also be used as slow cookers.

- ▶ You'll want a range of sizes of **mixing bowls** for your *mise en place*.
- ▶ We recommend using **wooden spoons and spatulas** instead of steel or plastic. They are better for both your health and your pans.
- ▶ Use **measuring spoons** for dry ingredients and **glass measuring cups** for liquid ingredients.
- ▶ Perhaps most important is a little **imagination!** It's important to note that cooking, like life, never goes exactly as planned, despite all the best efforts. You don't have the exact right type of chili pepper? You can only find globe eggplant instead of Chinese? You can still make it work. Allow yourself some imagination, and freedom to embrace improvisation in the kitchen. This is a tool that will give you the peace to make healthy eating a sustainable practice for a lifetime, not a fleeting fad.

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### *Storing*

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See the *Foundational Cooking Tools* PDF in the resources for more tips and suggested brands.

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- ▶ When batch cooking real food, you'll need plenty of **storage containers**. We recommend getting glass containers with snap-lock lids. We want to avoid plastic, since putting hot food in plastic containers can leach unhealthy chemicals like BPA into the food. Plus, it's convenient to be able to see what's inside each container. We also recommend getting a variety of sizes, so you have big containers to store things like soups and small containers for things like a premade dressing for a salad.
- ▶ **Mason jars** are also useful for storage of liquids. If you freeze broth in mason jars, be sure to cool it down in the fridge first before putting it in the freezer, and don't fill it up too much, or it could crack.
- ▶ **Reusable silicone zip bags** like Stasher bags are an eco-friendly replacement to disposable bags and are incredibly versatile. Plus, you can wash them in the dishwasher, making cleanup a breeze.

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- ▶ Reusable silicone **muffin molds** or **ice cube trays** are versatile tools to make individual-size flavor bombs for future use. You can make chimichurri once, and freeze it into little cubes for fast future flavor bombs.

### COOKING TIPS

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See the *Foundational Cooking Techniques* PDF for more cooking tips.

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### *Making Mistakes is Part of the Process*

Perhaps the most important advice we can give you if you're just starting out in the kitchen is to not expect perfection from yourself. Part of what makes cooking seem scary is the idea that you might spend time and money on ingredients only to have it not turn out the way you want, or that it will be totally ruined and you'll have to throw it out. We promise, making mistakes is part of the process, and it's something *every* cook has experienced, including the most experienced chefs at the best restaurants. At some point, we'll *all* accidentally use two tablespoons of cayenne pepper instead of mild chili powder, rendering the chili so

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screaming hot it's inedible, or forget to set a timer and burn the quiche, or use salt instead of sugar, or splatter tomato sauce up against the wall, or melt a plastic lid resting on a stovetop element that's still hot. Try to just see it as a learning experience, and the cost of ingredients as tuition in your self-taught culinary school. It'll be something you can laugh about later! And, it's always a good idea to have some already prepped meals in the freezer so you can defrost something quickly if and when you have a kitchen disaster so you can avoid ordering takeout.

Instead of expecting perfection and feeling defeated when you don't achieve it, reframe your mistakes as something that needs to be "completed". Then, you can feel good about "checking off" one of those mistakes, especially because you're much less likely to make that same mistake again, and it will help you to roll with the punches.

### *Take Care of Yourself*

When you're cooking, make sure to take care of the most important asset you have to make healthy food: you! Give yourself the setup that you need to make a cooking environment that you will love and crave being in.

- ▶ Always start in a clean kitchen.

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- ▶ Get your favorite Spotify playlist or podcast playing on your headphones.
- ▶ Enlist help from your partner or other family member to keep an eye on the kiddos.
- ▶ Clear off the countertops so you have plenty of room to work.
- ▶ Make sure you have a tall glass of water handy so you can stay hydrated.
- ▶ Wear an apron so you don't ruin your clothes with splattering oil.
- ▶ Make sure you have sufficient lighting so you can see what you're doing.
- ▶ Try to use good body mechanics: keep your elbows by your sides and make small, intentional movements to save energy and minimize mistakes. If you get back pain from standing, take breaks, or try using an anti-fatigue mat with cushioning.

Lastly, when you start feeling overwhelmed or you start to feel yourself getting frustrated, give yourself permission to take a break and go for a walk, or take a shower, or make a cup of tea and sit down in the living room for a few minutes, so you can avoid a kitchen meltdown before it happens.

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### *Have Fun!*

The most important thing to remember is to have fun. It's much easier to stick to things that we enjoy and want to do—and framing that perspective is so important to this process. It can be such a pleasure to cruise around the grocery store, surveying the beautiful fruits of someone else's labor—to pick up, smell, squeeze, often taste, and always relish in the abundance that is available to us. While we don't always have time to live slowly enough to appreciate this, it is a great reminder. It's all about perspective, enjoyment, appreciation and delighting in the simplicity and perfection of a perfectly ripe, fragrant tomato.

Remember, we don't have to hold ourselves to an impossible standard—let “good enough” be good enough! We're home cooks, and sometimes the kitchen is going to be too small or not have enough counter space. There will be times we don't have the exact equipment a recipe calls for. And sometimes after a food prep session, the kitchen might look like pot of beef stew exploded right in the middle of it. But, we can delight in the messiness and laugh at our mistakes, and remember that we're doing the best that we can with what we have. Let's relish in this beautiful part of being human, and enjoy the hands-on, sometimes messy experience of making our own food!



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As Joel Salatin puts it:

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*“Human self-actualization—human affirmation, I think—is actually encouraged and stimulated when we viscerally participate in the physical elements of life. There is no comparison with looking back at the end of the day and seeing gleaming jars of fresh-made canned salsa sitting on the shelf, that you've picked the tomatoes and you've sliced and diced and you've smelled it, and you've been viscerally involved, touching, smelling, shaping, moving it and preserving it for the future. There's nothing that compares with the sight and the ability to participate and have a visceral relationship with that production on the shelf, compared with being the top performer in the latest video game.”*

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