

10 Tips for REAL FOOD Newbies

boxed foods into a diet based on wholesome, natural traditional foods, those first few weeks (months? years?) can feel daunting at best, and completely impossible at worst. It's hard, especially if you were raised on Lean Cuisine, Pop Tarts and Crystal Light. Never mind the conflicting information in the media: the government tells you to stick to low fat, but recently published studies illustrate the importance of high quality fats –

including butter. While *Nourished Kitchen* focuses exclusively on real foods, traditionally prepared to maximize nutrition, the site really centers around the pleasure of cooking – and for those just starting out, just giving up the frozen suppers and drive-thrus, it's not enough to share recipes or techniques; rather, you need more practical and hands-on advice.

So here it is. Print it out and pin it to your fridge, because it's a good one – and I promise not to wax poetic about the luxury of raw cream or a freshly picked peach still warm from the sun – that is, until the next post.

1. Learn to read labels, really read them.

My first bit advice to anyone learning how to ditch processed foods and cook from scratch is simple: learn to read labels. When you take the time to actually read labels thoroughly, you'll find crazy words like disodium guanylate, TBHQ (a form of butane – that's *lighter fluid!*), MSG (a neurotoxin), artificial colors, nitrates and nitrites, BHA and BHT, and others. Taking the time to read labels, and then follow up on the ingredients you don't immediately recognize is often enough to prevent you from tossing those foods into your shopping basket. After all, who wants to serve up a plate of food laced with lighter fluid, neurotoxins and known human carcinogens to their children?

2. Ditch the boxes and packages and learn to stick to single-ingredient foods.

So once you've read the labels on those boxes, backs, tins and packages of processed foods, it's time to ditch them. Make the move to single ingredient foods; that is, only purchase foods from the store that contain one ingredient: a bag of brown rice, a bottle of olive oil, a package of butter, a pint of honey.

3. Give up that low-fat mentality, and dive into some butter and olive oil and maybe even tallow.

Do yourself a favor, and give up that low-fat mentality. The low-fat, low-cholesterol dietary dogma of the 70s, 80s and 90s has largely been discredited; moreover, it's probably worse for our collective health as it ignores our evolutionary heritage and the very foods that nourished the good health of our ancestors who were largely free of chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease. Learn to love real fats: butter, coconut oil, olive oil and even grass-fed tallow and pastured lard.

4. Ditch refined sweeteners, and choose unrefined sweeteners in strict moderation.

Ditch the sugar, the high fructose corn syrup and, yes, even the agave nectar. Sugar, natural and traditional or otherwise, is not good for anyone's health; however, if you need a little something sweet to help you make that transition and reset your tastebuds, add raw honey, molasses, date sugar, unrefined cane sugar, sorghum syrup and brown rice syrup to your basket. Moreover, use these sweeteners in smaller and smaller quantities each time you prepare a dish, whip up a batch of cookies or sweeten your tea.

5. Shop for fresh, local and sustainably grown fruits and vegetables.

Vegetables number among my many not-so-secret loves, but if you're going to start cooking real food for your family, you need to start to love them too. Don't be fooled by the seemingly low prices of frozen and tinned vegetables; on a ounce-by-ounce basis, they're not less expensive than fresh vegetables, purchased on sale and in season. Besides, fresh vegetables – particularly picked recently from local farms practicing sustainable methods – often offer richer and more complex flavors. Good flavor helps you to feed your family foods they'll actually like – without dousing them in processed food additives or boiling them to death over the range.

6. Shop for fresh milk, or, at the very least, always choose grass-fed.

I've shared my love of fresh milk and why I **drink raw milk** before, but if you can tolerate dairy foods, choosing the right milks, butters, cheeses and creams makes all the difference – not only in flavor, but also in nutritive value. Fresh milk from grass-fed cows is rich in micronutrients; what's more, it's also rich in immune-building beneficial bacteria and food enzymes. If fresh milk just isn't your style, at the very least choose vat-pasteurized milk from grass-fed cows as it is richer in nutrients and wholesome fats than conventionally produced milk and a far sight better than even most organic milk you find in the dairy case at your grocery store.

7. Learn to love (the right) meats.

Much like choosing milk, the effort you place into choosing the right meats makes all the difference. The conditions of concentrated animal feed operations are deplorable, but there's an alternative beyond meatless Mondays and out-and-out vegetarianism. Choosing meats from pasture- and grass-based operations ensures that you consume high quality meats from animals that were raised with respect for their natural diets and humane treatment. These meats are richer in micronutrients, less apt to contamination by pathogens like e. coli and salmonella, and are better sources of wholesome fats than their conventionally raised counterparts.

8. Develop a repertoire of fast, easy, simple foods your family actually likes (so you don't end up in the drive-thru).

Once you've figured out what not to buy, and also what it's best to buy, it's best to develop a plan that'll prevent you from relapsing into your old ways and the unhealthy comfort of a standard american diet. We all get stressed. We all become overworked. We all become tired, so it's important to have a back-up plan – a repertoire of fast, easy and simple foods that your family can appreciate and that keep you from heading to the drive-thru. Things like chicken fingers (made with almond flour, and without TBHQ), or homemade sun tea instead of soda, or, better yet, learn to use your slowcooker to make healthy “no-fuss” meals.

9. Try some super foods. Who knows? you may end up loving them.

Don't be afraid to try something new. Traditional peoples thrived on foods native to their region and these invariably included some form of a highly nutrient-dense food: liver, roe, shellfish, oily fish, fresh butter, cod liver oil. Sure, liver may not sound appealing initially, but it's extraordinarily rich in vitamins and you might not even notice it, if you prepare it properly.

10. Give back to the real food community.

Lastly, give back to the real food community. Share with friends – not only articles covering real food, or real food recipes, but also by preparing wholesome meals for your family or for get-togethers. Use social media like twitter and facebook to share articles, your favorite blogs, ideas and activism alerts (did you know you can follow [Nourished Kitchen on Facebook?](#)). Volunteer at your local farmers market. Plant a community garden. Give some real food to your food bank. Teach schoolchildren how to cook. Just give back, because the movement depends on each one of us.