

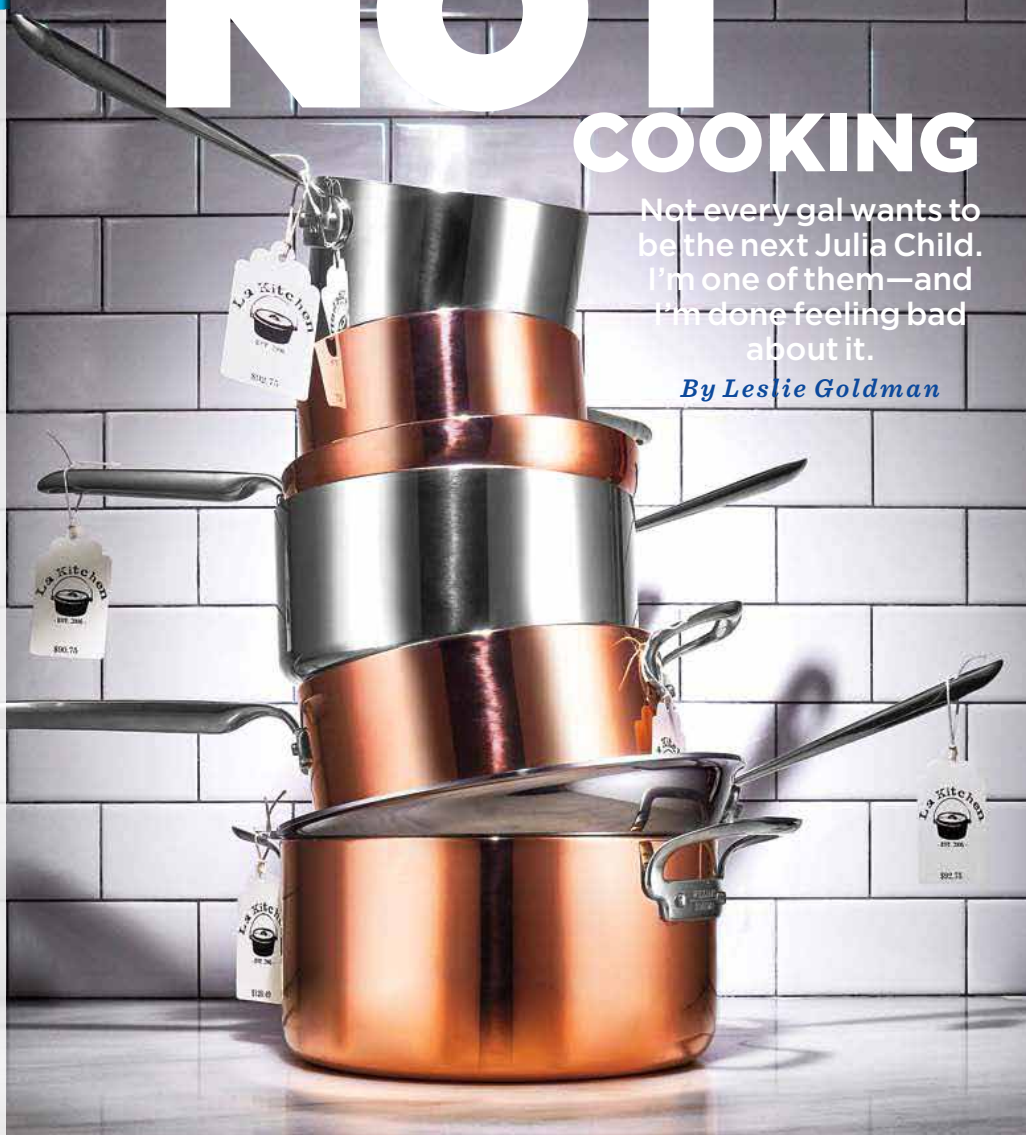
# THE JOY OF NOT COOKING

I own exactly two cookbooks.

*I'm In the Kitchen, Now What?!* was received as a bridal shower gift 12 years ago, but if you were to leaf through it now, the pages would peel apart like an algebra book on day one of seventh grade.

The second, *What The F\*\*k Should I Make for Dinner?*, perfectly sums up my feelings toward the time and energy killer that is cooking: a bittersweet blend of apathy and resentment, plus a pinch of Resting Bitch Face.

Sure, Seafood and Spring Vegetable Risotto sounds amazing, but unlike the mavens of the Food Network—who can't seem to sauté garlic without climaxing—the thought of hovering over the counter, handpicking the poopshoots out of a dozen shrimp, makes me want to barf.



Not every gal wants to be the next Julia Child. I'm one of them—and I'm done feeling bad about it.

By Leslie Goldman

Here's the irony: I'm a health writer with 20 years of experience and a degree in nutritional science. I know full well that scratch cooking is the cheapest, heart-healthiest, and waistline-friendliest way to eat. People who cook most of their meals at home consume fewer calories and less sugar, fat, and carbs compared with those who have an ongoing love affair with their Seamless app.

Studies have even found that people who regularly sit down to home-cooked meals are flat-out happier and may actually live longer.

Yet less than 60 percent of dinners are currently prepared at home, whereas 75 percent of '80s suppers were. Part of the reason is fairly obvious: We don't cook because we don't have to anymore. Sweating over a hot stove has been replaced by

dial-a-meal; to wit, nearly 7 million diners ordered from Grubhub in 2015, a 34 percent hike from 2014. And one in 10 at-home meals currently incorporate an item from a "grocerant"—supermarkets, convenience stores, and other retailers that stock ready-to-consume side dishes and prepared meals.

Still, for someone like me, who knows just how good cooking can be for a person,

you'd expect a little more lovin' for the oven. The thing is, at the end of a long day, the last thing I want to do is devote my final spurt of energy to dismembering a flaccid piece of raw chicken or attempting to re-create my husband's favorite food-truck pho. I'm tired; I'd rather just open a box of soup and read a book or give myself a paper cut, dip it in lemon juice, and listen to it sizzle.

Another reason I secretly believe *cereal* is Latin for "pancakes take too long" is that cooking chafes my inner feminist. Ramani Durvasula, Ph.D., a psychology professor at California State University at Los Angeles, says I'm not alone: "Even though more men are learning how to cook, it still has a very stereotyped, 1950s, 'woman in the kitchen' vibe. If you're trying to

simultaneously juggle being a professional, a wife, a mother, that can feel imprisoning."

Even hunting and gathering gets my apron in a bunch. Between the general supermarket, pit stops at Whole Foods for organic non-GMO essentials, and a run to Trader Joe's for riced cauliflower, many of us are grocery shopping more often than we have sex—even as we actually cook less. After that, food prep takes forever, eating takes four minutes, and then...dishes.

Look, my family will never arrive home to a meltingly tender rib eye lacquered with merlot demi-glace. And guess what? There's no shame in my game. I'm not gunning for a spot on *Top Chef*. No one's rating my brussels sprouts on Yelp. Yes, there might be some people who blame the slow

death of home cooking on women leaning in to their jobs, but there are plenty of career women who also make a mean brisket. The difference, Durvasula says, is that I don't enjoy cooking, and as such, struggling to drag the food processor out of the pantry feels oppressive to me. One woman's glass casserole dish is another woman's glass ceiling.

In other words, if you can't stand the kitchen, just get out of the heat—and erase the "I'm lame" feelings from your head. If meal prep pisses you off, Durvasula says, "that stress is probably going to negate the dietary benefits you get from cooking at home." I'm not saying you need to eat gas-station sushi, but there are a zillion other actually healthy options for getting food in your belly. So bon appétit.

## Hold the Guilt

Max out nutrition and curtail calories while you dial it in. What to order from typical delivery spots.

### Italian/Pizza

Have a single slice of the pie, along with a salad containing classic 'za toppings—tomatoes, mozzarella, mushrooms, and roasted red peppers.

In lieu of dressing, drizzle on a tablespoon of pesto—the healthy fats (olive oil and pine nuts) will help you absorb the good stuff in the salad, suggests Amy Gorin, R.D.

### Chinese/Thai

Get a brothy soup, like miso, to start—studies show it will help you eat less overall. Then order your fave dish steamed, sugar- and sodium-laden sauces on the side, with double veggies to balance out noodle- and rice-heavy dishes with filling fiber. "You'll get bok choy, snow peas, shiitake mushrooms—vegetables you don't typically stock at home," says Leslie Schilling, R.D.

### Mexican

Beans seem like the smart choice but are often cooked in lard—no *bueno*. Steak tacos are packed with lean protein and also with iron, a critical nutrient for exercise performance.

Order them on corn tortillas (90 calories per six-inch tortilla versus 150 for flour), add some avocado, then pile on the pico de gallo—one of the freshest things on the menu—for extra vitamin C (which aids iron absorption).

### Sandwich

Load up a whole-wheat roll with cucumbers, tomatoes, olives, green peppers, avocado, pickles, and spinach, and ask for double protein (choosing the least processed kind, such as turkey instead of salami). Schilling recommends about six slices of deli meat (total, a stack the width of your index finger) for a six-inch sandwich. Try mustard, hummus, or avocado in place of mayonnaise. ■

## Healthy Home-Cooking Hacks\*

\*without the cooking

No ovens were turned on in the making of these meals.

### PB&J 2.0

Spread a slice of whole-grain bread (go for one with less than four grams of sugar) with cashew or almond butter. Layer on fresh raspberries, halved grapes, or sliced strawberries; sprinkle with chia or sunflower seeds for crunch; dust with cinnamon; enjoy.

### Overnight Oats

In a mason jar, layer ½ cup dry oats + ½ cup milk (dairy or nut-based) + 2 tablespoons trail mix + pinch of spices (nutmeg, unsweetened cocoa powder, cinnamon, or vanilla extract). Seal and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, dig in!

### Rice and Beans

Place ½ cup cooked brown rice (such as Minute or Uncle Ben's) in a bowl with ¾ cup rinsed canned black beans. Microwave 90 seconds, then stir in as much fresh salsa as desired. Top with a dollop each of guacamole and low-fat plain Greek yogurt, and chow.

