



*Finding  
Balance*

LAYLA AL NAIF



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# Table of Contents

[Welcome](#)

[My Health Journey](#)

[No Longer Plant Based](#)

[Fad Diets and Why They Don't Work](#)

[Intermittent Fasting](#)

[Back to Basics](#)

[Cutting Out Food Allergens, Yes or No?](#)

[What is Intuitive Eating?](#)

[Finding a Balance That's Right For You](#)

[Weight Loss](#)

[Where Does Fitness Fit Into All of This?](#)

[Gut Health and Digestive Issues](#)

[Ingredients](#)

[Recipes](#)

[Seafood](#)

[Chicken & Meat](#)

[Plant-Based](#)

[Sides](#)

[Desserts](#)

## **Fish**

[Miso Glazed Salmon](#)

[Ginger and Soy Sea Bass](#)

[Mediterranean Snapper](#)

[Crispy Fish Tacos](#)

[Fish Fingers](#)

[Prawn Curry](#)

## **Meats**

[Chicken Fajitas](#)

[Chicken Nuggets](#)

[Chicken Teriyaki](#)

[Chicken Meatballs](#)

[Baked Chicken Thighs](#)

[Chicken and Leek Pie](#)

[Wholesome Chicken Soup](#)

[Cashew Chicken](#)

[Meat Ma'loobeh](#)

## **Plant-Based**

[Creamy Tomato Pasta](#)

[Pesto Pasta](#)

[Ratatouille](#)

## **Sides**

[Milk Bread](#)

[Jasmine Rice](#)

[French Fries](#)

## **Desserts**

[Cinnamon Banana Bread](#)

[Pancakes](#)

["Snickers" Bars](#)

[Chocolate Fudge Brownies](#)

[Cashew Butter Cookies](#)



# Welcome

A lot has changed since the last time I wrote about my health journey and released my first e-book, *99% Plant Based*, but I am all about embracing change and evolving as and when my body needs me to. As you may have heard me say many times if you've been following along on Instagram, I try my best not to get caught up in labels.

Here is a little recap to give you a better understanding of what has happened since my last e-book came out in early 2018 and for those of you who are new to my journey, welcome.

Layla x

## MY HEALTH JOURNEY

When I was 19 years old, I was diagnosed with PCOS along with a long list of other health issues (hypo-thyroid, acne, hormone imbalance, vitamin/mineral deficiencies, digestive issues, weight gain, and food intolerances). I was told that I would struggle to get pregnant and that I would need to be on birth control to 'manage' the symptoms of PCOS. Hearing that from multiple doctors at 19 was scary, I didn't know a thing about this condition.

I decided to do my own research and take control of my health. I sought out a functional doctor who understood that I wanted to handle things more holistically with supplements, superfoods, and alternative medicine rather than turn to prescription medications. I began studying nutrition and eventually became certified as a nutritionist. At that time, I was also getting my yoga teacher certification. During that stressful period in my life, yoga was the only thing that brought me some sort of peace and helped me get stronger, both mentally and physically. I began heavily researching my condition. Even though it is a very common condition amongst women, I found that it wasn't openly spoken about.

I will say, having now seen multiple doctors, both traditional and functional, PCOS is a very broad term with a range of studies. I visited a fertility doctor for peace of mind before conceiving. He explained to me that to classify as PCOS, you must have three major symptoms. The first is high male hormones, which can be checked with a blood test. The



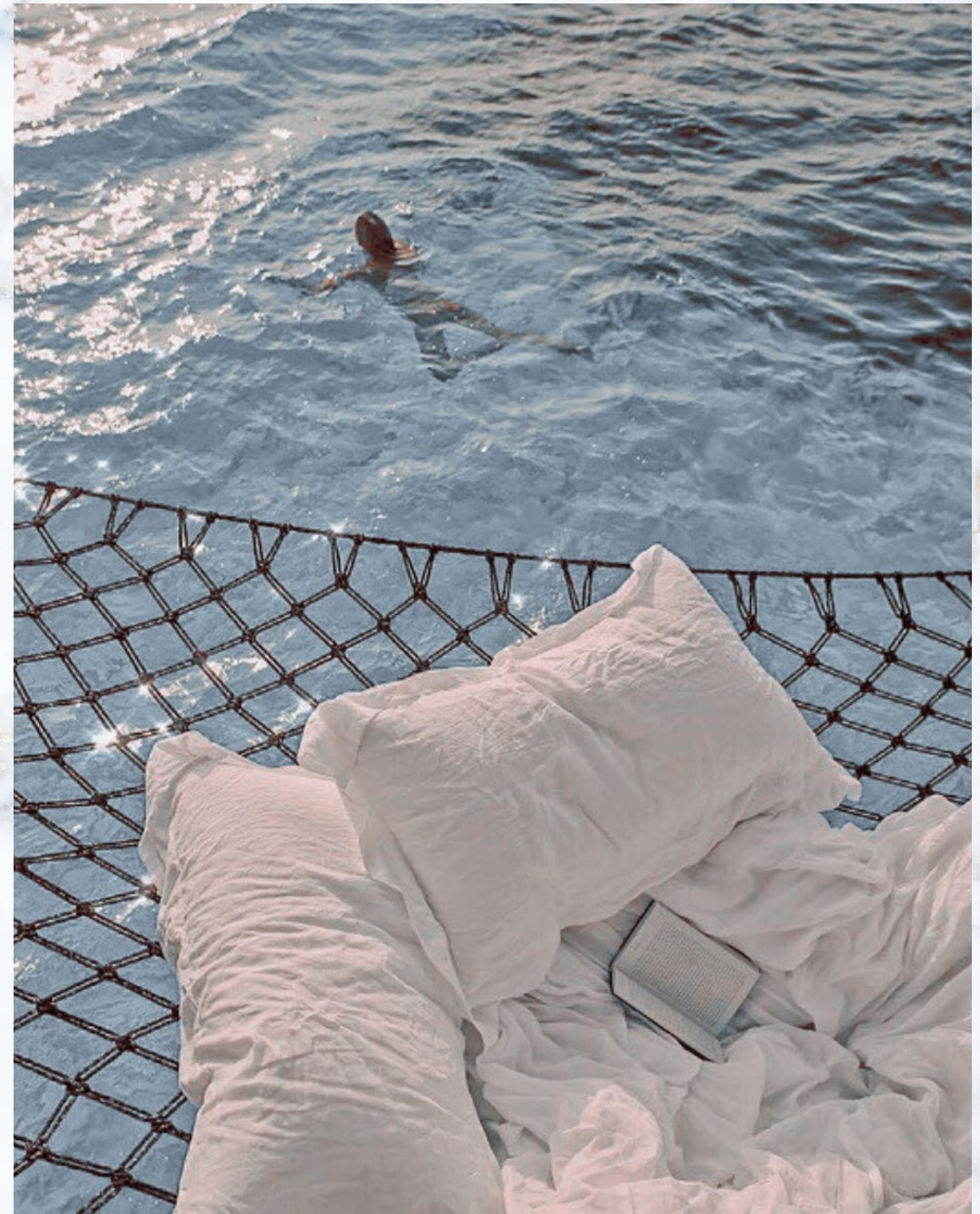
second is irregular periods. The third is having more than 12 follicles on each ovary, which can be assessed on an ultrasound. If you do not tick all three boxes, then you *technically* don't classify as someone with PCOS.

After a couple of years of experimenting with my food and diet with no positive outcome, I decided to try a plant-based diet. Frustrated and tired from this whole process, I remember thinking to myself, 'this is my last resort'.

I had always read so much about the power of a plant-based diet, but it was never something that appealed to me being such a foodie all my life. Growing up in the Middle East, meat and dairy are staples in our diet. After watching a few documentaries, I was fascinated to see how people healed themselves of terminal illnesses through a plant-based diet.

I had to give it a try. Seeing as I had already been avoiding dairy, I decided to remove that first. I then removed red meat from my diet, followed by processed sugar. It was a gradual change that progressed over the course of two years. Over time, I found that following a plant-based diet made me feel better both mentally and physically. The weight I had gained from the hormone imbalance started to gradually drop off. My skin, my mood, and my energy improved. With the exception of fish, I transitioned into a plant-based diet for about two years. The following year, I excluded fish and went fully plant-based.

The years 2016-2019 were crucial to getting me to where I am today. Following a holistic treatment and a 99% plant-based diet, I finally started to feel like myself again.



## NO LONGER PLANT BASED

In May 2019, I got pregnant with my first child. I was fully plant-based leading up to that point. A few months before conceiving, my body started to crave a wider variety of foods like fish and chicken. I listened to my body (to my and everyone else's surprise) and explored those cravings only to get pregnant just one month later. I am convinced my body was trying to tell me something.

Every pregnancy is extremely different and there is no right or wrong way to eat while you're pregnant or while you're trying to conceive. You need to trust your instincts. For me, having a little bit of everything is what seemed to work the best for my body. My journey through conception, pregnancy, and postpartum is one that I can't wait to share with you separately, soon.

This in no way means that I am throwing away years of research on plant-based nutrition or abandoning it completely. It's important to be mindful of what your body needs in different phases. Our bodies are constantly evolving, and we must listen carefully, be open-minded, and be willing to make the necessary changes.

I believe that a plant-based diet is extremely powerful and healing, particularly if you are struggling with health issues. Being plant-based was a cure to a problem that I had. Now, I use that knowledge to eat that way a few times a week rather than every day, a method that is more sustainable to my lifestyle and health.

What we put into our bodies is incredibly powerful and we need to be mindful of what we're consuming. Finding that balance is what we are aiming for.

I'm writing this guide because it doesn't have to be one extreme or the other. I want to try and help others find a balance where not every meal is surrounding an animal product, most of the time that is the case. This guide is a tool you can use to help you establish balance, teach you how to eat more intuitively to your needs, and provide many recipes that are delicious, simple, and nutritious.

I include a variety of plant-based and non-plant-based recipes in this book to give you the option of having both.

*For more plant-based recipes, you can find them in my e-book [99% Plant Based](#) available on my website.*



## FAD DIETS AND WHY THEY DON'T WORK

I get asked quite often about popular diet trends that are found online and these incredible before and after photos of women who lose a large amount of weight in a short period of time.

I don't believe in these diets for one simple reason, cutting out an entire food group will not get you far for long. You may feel good for a while and you may even lose weight, but it is not sustainable, and your body will eventually find a way to tell you that it *needs* more.

The diets that I'm referring to include the Atkins diet, Paleo diet, Keto diet, and several others. Usually following diets like this end up with "cheat days". Restricting your diet leads to a negative relationship with food. If you need to "cheat," it's actually doing more harm to your mental health by becoming obsessive about calorie intake and the number on the scale. *How many people do you know who are scared to eat carbs? Scared of eating too much? Feel guilty after eating?*

The thought process that I pick up on a lot is: *"I will only follow this diet until I lose x number of kilos, then I will eat more of everything"* but again, this is not going to be effective in the long run. You will follow a strict regime given to you by a dietician, a website, or a book, and lose your desired amount of weight. Then you will re-introduce the foods you have removed and slowly regain the weight



that you've lost. It's a vicious cycle. Often, these diets call for foods that are highly refined and processed, but being 'low calorie,' most people look past it.

The best advice would be to save yourself time and energy and commit to a balanced lifestyle that satisfies and makes you happy to feel and look your best. This looks different from person to person, embrace the change!

You need to find what works for your body and the only way to do this is to experiment with different food ratios.

This guide will help you tailor your diet to your needs, whether you want to lose, maintain, or gain weight. It will also be helpful if you simply want to learn more about eating intuitively, food combinations, and meal structures. This book is about balance. I want to share with you how I created balance for myself after reintroducing animal protein and explain that you don't have to go on a difficult, draining, diet to feel, look, or be at your best.



## INTERMITTENT FASTING

Intermittent fasting is the process of limiting the hours in which you eat. You stop eating at 6-7 PM and do not eat until 12-1 PM the next day, leaving you fasting for a 16-18 hour period.

I am not a big fan of intermittent fasting for long periods of time for the goal of weight loss. If you do this once a week or a few times a month for health benefits, it can serve its purpose by giving your body and gut a break from constantly digesting and breaking down food. It can also be beneficial to those who have the tendency to snack late at night, teaching discipline that these hours are a break for your body.

Skipping meals is not something I believe in. If you are hungry, your body is asking you for food and you should listen to it. It takes time to get to know your body. However, it does go both ways, if you're not hungry, you also don't have to force yourself to eat either. It is about familiarizing yourself with *your* body.

If you wake up and you're not hungry, you don't have to have breakfast like everyone says you do. Listen to your body's cues. If you do wake up hungry, have a nourishing meal.

"Intermittent fasting" is another fancy term that is trying to teach people how to lose weight through a calorie deficit, because you have a shorter window to eat, you likely won't eat as much food. There is a pattern here.

**Any form of sudden weight loss comes from one method: a calorie deficit.**

Losing weight through intermittent fasting or dieting is unsustainable in the long run. You will eventually go back to normal eating hours, eating a wider variety of food, or sudden binging which will result in going back to your original weight. Why put yourself through this?

There's always a cycle like this. Instead of putting your body through all of this stress, let us try to establish how to eat everything in moderation. Finding a sustainable and enjoyable way that won't feel torturous or restrictive.

What is moderate to me is different to you, there won't be a strict meal plan to follow because there is no one size fits all. I, for example, have a big appetite and when other people see how much food I put on my plate they're quite surprised. Another person might be completely satisfied with a quarter of what I eat and that is absolutely fine. I will be providing you with the tools to figure out what works for *your* body.

**AM I HUNGRY? OR AM I ACTUALLY CRAVING SUGAR?**

**AM I HUNGRY? OR AM I ACTUALLY DEHYDRATED?**

**Here's a little exercise to try at home:**

**Craving sugar?** Instead of reaching for the first thing you find in your snack cupboard, try having a few dates or some fruit and see if it subsides. If your body is asking for sugar it could simply mean you're not getting enough natural sugar in your diet from fruit, dates and all that good stuff. Nine times out of ten, it will satisfy that sweet tooth. Alternatively, sometimes a sugar craving can mean you're not getting enough greens, maybe try upping your intake and see if that helps.

**Hungry, even though you ate very recently?** Sometimes feeling hungry can just mean that you're dehydrated. Have you been drinking enough water? Try drinking a big glass of water first before reaching for the snacks. See if you're still hungry afterward. It is all about experimenting for yourself. Getting through 2-3L of water per day is crucial. Build your water intake up slowly each day. I recommend a stainless-steel flask that keeps your water cool with a straw lid.

**Craving something savory?** Sometimes this can be a sign that you are lacking electrolytes and minerals, try adding some pink salt or electrolyte drops to your water on a daily basis, it helps replenish those minerals.

## BACK TO BASICS

We tend to complicate things these days and people are more confused than ever when it comes to nutrition. This may be a result of the conflicting information found online. I'd like to clarify a few things and debunk some myths that I'm sure you've seen and heard too.

### **“Don't eat too much fruit because it's high in sugar/carbs”**

Fruit has some of the most essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. They can benefit the body more than any other food group. Eating fruit does not have the same effect on your body and insulin levels as eating processed sugar. It has actually been proven that eating a wider variety of fruit can lower your risk of getting diabetes.

### **“You need to cut out carbs if you want to lose weight”**

Firstly, the term “carbs” refers to multiple foods. Let's break it down and get specific. Whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat, rye, spelt, and barley have essential B-Vitamins, fiber, protein, antioxidants, zinc, and trace minerals which our bodies need for energy. Cutting out carbs is one of the worst things you can do for your body in terms of your health. White refined carbohydrates such as white bread, white flour, and white pasta have no nutritional value and, because they are refined and heavily processed, they can lead to

inflammation in the body along with other side effects. Limiting your intake of refined white carbohydrates will not harm you. However, by removing whole grains from your diet, you are restricting yourself from essential nutrients that your body needs.

### **“Adding butter or coconut oil to your coffee can help you burn more calories”**

Most people drink coffee every morning, right? Adding butter or coconut oil, which is pure saturated fat, every morning to our routine increases the cholesterol levels in our blood. If you drink coffee, just drink regular coffee and enjoy it. Keep it simple.

### **“You should eat a high protein diet if you want to be lean and lose weight”**

The obsession with protein continues. Eating excessive amounts of protein as some diets recommend, can actually be extremely toxic and an overload on your bones, liver, and kidneys. Some of the side effects include joint pain, bad breath, constipation, dehydration, excess fat around the stomach, and headaches. You do not need to center every single meal around animal protein in order to be lean or lose weight.

Food is nourishment for our bodies and the more simply you eat, the better you are going to feel. The more whole foods and the less packaged food you eat, the better you will feel.



## CUTTING OUT FOOD ALLERGENS, YES OR NO?

Getting food intolerance tests done has become very popular in the last few years. I myself have had a few done, but I've realized that once you start listening to your body, you will be able to tell what bothers you all on your own.

Having said that, if you have an actual intolerance or allergy to something, then, of course, you should not be eating it and you may need to do a blood test to get to the bottom of it.

If you are not severely allergic to anything, you may still eat something and then experience a stomach ache, headache, breakout, or fatigue, and this could be a mild intolerance and should not be ignored.

### DAIRY & EGGS

#### HOW DO YOU FEEL AFTER EATING DAIRY?

*Milk, yellow cheese, white cheese, cream, butter, yoghurt*

#### HOW DO YOU FEEL AFTER EATING EGGS?

*Egg whites, hard-boiled eggs, runny egg yolks, mixed into a cake*

I'll use myself as an example. When it comes to dairy, if I eat yoghurt, white cheeses, or butter, they do not cause a reaction. If I eat yellow cheese, milk, or cream I immediately get very sharp stomach pains along with breakouts on my skin the next day. I have noticed that anytime I eat

runny egg yolk, my stomach hurts for the rest of the day. However, if it is fully cooked or mixed into baked goods, I'm completely fine.

I urge you to do this activity at home and notice how you feel after eating each type of food listed. You'll be fascinated once you start paying closer attention and experimenting with which foods sit well and which do not.

Generally, adults do not digest lactose very well and this is why so many people are coming to realize that dairy *doesn't* make them feel good and are removing it from their diets, or at least limiting their consumption.

## **GLUTEN**

If you have celiac disease (severe allergy to gluten), you will be able to figure that out through a food intolerance test, and normally it is associated with severe reactions such as abdominal pain, severe bloating, and constipation.

I was not intolerant to gluten, however, I still decided to remove it from my diet for about two years because of all the side effects I had read about, specifically that it causes inflammation in the body. I still avoid eating processed white carbohydrates because it adds no value to my diet. I opt for high-quality wholemeal sourdough bread and continue to eat any whole grains which naturally contain gluten. It is all about finding the right types of food, not so much cutting them out altogether.

In conclusion, only you will know what you are intolerant to, based on how you feel after eating certain foods. It takes some time, patience, and some experimenting.





## WHAT IS INTUITIVE EATING?

I discovered the term ‘intuitive eating’ a few years back, it’s self-explanatory, listen to your body when it comes to food. Don’t do exactly what your friend or your sister does. Listen to *yourself*.

You need to practice this. It won’t come to you overnight. Some people struggle with it because they say, “if I was to listen to my body, I’d be eating cake every night for dinner!” which is true, sometimes your body wants some cake and croissants and other delicious things that have been labeled ‘bad’ for us. Normally, this is a sign that something is missing from your diet or that you have been feeling too restricted.

Have you ever stopped to think: “My body is craving a piece of cake, maybe this means it is craving sugar? Oh wait, I didn’t eat any fruit today, let me try having a piece of fruit or a few dates and see if it curbs the craving”

This trick works almost every single time. Sugar is a broad term. Sugar cravings are not bad cravings, it is your body’s way of telling you something. Sugar is not your enemy, you need it to survive.

Processed sugar and refined syrups found in packaged foods are not beneficial and can be quite addictive. When you have processed sugar, it will usually make you crave it over and over again until you break the cycle. The negative effects of processed sugar include breakouts, headaches, energy crashes, mood swings. The list goes on.

Intuitive eating is about interpreting what your body needs.

There's nothing wrong with indulging in your cravings. It is more about knowing that your body doesn't need this piece of cake, it is that you want to have some and then you move on from it. It takes a lot of discipline but eventually you won't feel like it controls you anymore.

Have you ever been sitting at a dinner table and when dessert comes you are staring at it wanting to eat it so badly, but you're scared of the guilt you'll feel the minute you're done eating? I have in the past and it is a horrible feeling to associate guilt with food, fearing all the calories that are on the plate in front of you. I always felt like that dessert was controlling me. When I cut out sugar for a while and a few months passed, I no longer cared. If I wanted some, I'd have it.

The more you deprive yourself of things, the more you want them. If you tell yourself junk food is the enemy and it is horrible, you'll most likely want it even more. It's human instinct. If you want to have a burger, go and buy some high-quality, grass-fed, organic meat and make it at home. If you want a really good chocolate cake, find a recipe that uses unrefined sugar and coconut oil instead of white sugar and too much butter.

There are so many ways of altering recipes and foods so that they're more nutritious and beneficial to the body. You will always physically feel better after having that healthier alternative too.

This is the way that I stay disciplined in my own diet, anytime I want something I allow myself to have it. I try to make it so it's the best version of that food and it's always just as satisfying for me.

For these reasons, the concept of cheat meals does not sit right with me. Eating healthy all week and then overindulging on a "cheat day" can leave you feeling quite sick. How can that be good for your body and your mind? Instead of being restrictive all week eating salads and grilled chicken, why not eat the things you feel like eating in the best way you can. All in moderation!







## FINDING A FOOD BALANCE THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

I want to get more specific about what kind of balance I found works for me. As mentioned, this will vary from person to person.

After years of experimenting, I found that a diet that is higher in carbs and lower in fat helps maintain my weight. Eating wholegrains fills me with energy and most of my meals are centered around them. That has no effect on my weight and does not make me feel heavy or too full.

Chicken and fish are staples in my diet now. I include them in one of my meals per day. I find that having animal protein at two meals makes me feel heavy and sluggish. I eat red meat when I'm craving it, which is about once a month.

Good fats are incredibly nutritious. I notice that over-consuming these may lead to some weight gain. Since I don't own a scale, these are mostly changes I would notice in how my clothes fit or how I'm feeling.

Over time, my cravings adjusted and I developed a natural balance that suits my needs, keeping my weight, and health stable. Feeling good in my clothes is important to me - not the number on the scale.

Having this self-awareness in your own body is crucial, weight changes are messages your body is sending you. Finding your food balance will be all you need to regulate yourself and your weight; a method that might take longer, but is much safer than extreme dieting methods.

## WEIGHT LOSS

You shouldn't have to lose weight to feel good. However, a lot of people have weight on them that they are unhappy with, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to reach your healthiest body weight.

I want to state very clearly that the number on the scale is not what is important. I say this because there are so many factors that can alter that number such as water retention, bloating or digestive issues, muscle mass, hormones, and so on. I don't have a scale at home, I tell my clients to focus on how they feel in their body.

Some people don't like what they see in the mirror or how they feel in their clothes. I believe that everyone has the right to feel good about themselves and if that means losing some weight, so be it.

I want to talk about weight loss because it is one of the most confusing topics in the health industry. I want to shed light on something that is so simple yet has been made so complicated.

Each body is different and will require different things. Rather than cutting out certain food groups altogether, the aim is to find a food ratio that works which varies from person to person.

When I was going through my weight gain due to PCOS, it was tough to see my body in that new light. Sure, I got

upset about it sometimes, but I knew it was temporary and that I'd find a solution, and eventually I did.

The way that I started the process of losing that weight, was to start experimenting with my intake of different food groups. For example, for a few weeks, I decided to focus my diet and meals around higher fat and lower carb, then lower fat and higher carb. Eventually, I started to notice what worked for me which was higher carb and lower fat.

I made minimal changes, like not eating as many nuts or nuts butters, removing excess oil, and removing processed sugar from my diet.

I found that this felt right for me at the time and I stuck to that for the rest of my weight loss journey. I was also transitioning to a more plant-based diet at the time, the last few kilograms only dropped off when I eliminated red meat and chicken. I didn't remove them for this purpose but eating a more plant-based diet was helpful for me when it came to weight loss.

I seem to thrive on a high carb diet. I followed this method of being more mindful of my fat intake until I reached the weight that felt right for me, and now it is something that I'm aware of. I'm not as cautious anymore, but it's something I learned about my body.

While weight loss does mean being in a slight calorie deficit, it doesn't mean you need to cut out food groups and eat bland, plain food. It just means that instead of consuming processed food that is "low calorie", have real foods that are nutritious and nourishing. You need to remember that your health is much more important than your weight. Without essential nutrients from whole grains, good fat, fruit, and vegetables, your health will decline in some way.





## WHERE DOES FITNESS FIT INTO THIS?

Let me ask you a question, do you go to the gym because you love your body and you simply want to feel good afterward? Or do you do it because you feel some sort of guilt about what food you consumed the day before?

Many of us, women in particular, workout as a punishment to burn off something they ate. I see this constantly on social media, “running on the treadmill to burn off the pasta I ate last night”.

We have been given the bodies that we have whether you're stick-thin, flat-chested, petite or curvy with D cups. Everyone has something that they dislike about their body. Comparing yourself to others will get you nowhere except feeling bad about yourself. We need to try and change our mind-sets, this takes time and effort, but you should treat your body with love.

I would say that 70% of our bodies are “made in the kitchen.” Nutrition is key, working out is incredibly important but you can't “burn off” a poor diet. Going to work out multiple times a day and then eating poorly or not enough, will stress out your body, likely causing injury.

Taking a step back from your fitness regime can be good to reassess what your goals and intentions are. What is it that you *actually* enjoy doing? Find that workout or class that makes you feel incredible, even if it's a simple restorative yoga class. It doesn't have to be a boot camp class that burns hundreds of calories in an hour that makes you nauseous. Although, some people love that. So, make sure you find the type of workout that you and your body can handle and also *enjoy*.

For me, it's yoga and Pilates. I find that they lengthen, tone, and strengthen my body from head to toe and also make me feel incredible and confident. People usually ask: "But does yoga help you lose weight?" and to that I always say, weight loss/gain begins and ends in the kitchen. Don't work out to lose weight. It is an aid, yes, and essential to build strength and tone your body, but not the main solution.

I want to stress that fitness should be enjoyable and done in order to feel great. I want you to leave that class or gym feeling proud of yourself even if you did a quick twenty minutes of stretching and then went home.

Working out will get you toned and feeling strong both mentally and physically. I wouldn't be able to survive without working out, doing yoga, or some kind of activity each day even if it's just going for a long brisk walk. I only emphasize that you exercise because you love your body and not to punish it.



## GUT HEALTH & DIGESTIVE ISSUES

I have a page in my previous e-book on bloating and digestive issues, however this is still one of the biggest topics today. Many people struggle with bloating, acid reflux, gas, heartburn and other digestive issues which are extremely uncomfortable. I myself used to struggle with bloating prior to my hormone imbalance and I never quite understood why, it didn't have anything to do with the quality of the food I was eating, but everything made me bloat.

Here is an excerpt from my e-book *99% Plant Based*:

*"Heartburn, bloating and gas can be symptoms of a lack of digestive enzymes in our system. This means that there aren't a sufficient number of enzymes to break down the food you're introducing into your body. This can be due to ageing, lack of stomach acid, chronic stress or inflammation in the digestive tract. If you have low stomach acidity levels it is likely that you also lack digestive enzymes, which was my case at the time. When your body isn't breaking down the food properly, this means that you are not fully absorbing the nutrients from that food either. There is a way to test this with a homeopathic doctor in order to figure out if this is the root cause of your symptoms, usually through a stool test."*

While I was seeing my doctor for the PCOS, I addressed the issue and was put on two supplements to help. I am not a doctor and cannot recommend that anyone take these supplements because that is outside my jurisdiction.

**You must consult your doctor before taking any new supplements as there might be contraindications that you are not aware of.**

Digestive Enzymes and HCL & Pepsin are the two supplements that I took for several years to combat bloating. They are highly effective for anyone struggling with digestive issues. I urge you to do your own research on these two supplements to see if they are right for you.

# INGREDIENTS

I want to go into more detail about the ingredients that I use. Depending on where you are, what is available to me may not be available to you. I will try to offer as many options as possible!

## PASTA

I opt for brown rice pasta, it is the closest texture to regular pasta. Other options are lentil pasta or chickpea pasta. Try different brands until you find the ones you like!

## GRAINS

My go-to grain is jasmine rice or brown basmati rice. I recommend getting a wide variety of organic grains into your diet such as buckwheat, quinoa, barley, and so on. Make sure you wash or soak your grains before cooking them as it helps digestion.

## FLOUR

I have a wide variety of flours in my kitchen. Most of the time I will opt for whole meal or spelt flour for baking, preferably organic. However, at times I do use regular all-purpose flour in small quantities.

## SUGAR

For baking, I use coconut sugar and raw cane sugar depending on the recipe. Coconut sugar is not as sweet, you may have to experiment with the amount depending on how sweet you like your treats.

## OILS & BUTTER

The best oils to cook with are avocado oil, sesame oil, and olive oil for their high smoke points. Extra virgin olive oil has a lower smoke point so it is best used cold.

I have started to incorporate small amounts of organic butter into my diet. I prefer it over vegan butter because I find that vegan butter can be highly processed. If you are avoiding dairy, I recommend substituting with coconut oil.

## CHICKEN, MEAT & FISH

Chicken: organic, free range, and hormone free.

Meat: grass-fed and organic.

Fish: organic or wild when available.

## FRUIT & VEG

I buy organic produce whenever possible, especially the items on the “dirty dozen” list, you can find this list online, it changes from time to time.

## OTHER

Mayonnaise: I prefer to have vegan mayo. Make sure the ingredients are minimal and you recognize each ingredient!

Ketchup: organic and using a better sweetener such as raw cane sugar.

Soy Sauce: I opt for tamari as it is naturally gluten free, or coconut aminos for a soy-free option.

Peanut butter & other nut butters: go for brands that contain nuts and salt, nothing else.

Honey: raw local honey is always best.

Maple syrup: high grade, preferably grade A or grade B.

A close-up photograph of numerous thin green stems with clusters of small, light purple flowers. The background is softly blurred, showing hints of a kitchen environment with a white bowl and wooden surfaces. The overall lighting is bright and natural.

# Recipes





*Seafood*

# Miso Glazed Salmon

(Serves 2)

## INGREDIENTS

2 wild salmon fillets  
12 asparagus stalks,  
chopped  
½ a head of  
Chinese cabbage,  
chopped

## SAUCE:

2 Tbsp white miso  
paste  
1 Tbsp honey or  
maple syrup  
2 Tbsp soy sauce or  
tamari  
1 Tbsp rice vinegar  
1 tsp sesame oil

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 175°C. Line a  
baking tray with parchment paper.

Mix all sauce ingredients together.

Use a sharp knife to score the  
thicker part of the salmon, helping  
it cook more evenly. Generously  
brush the sauce onto each salmon  
fillet.

Bake the salmon for 13-15 minutes,  
make sure not to overcook it.

In a pan with a tablespoon of  
sesame oil, sauté the vegetables  
and sprinkle with some salt and  
pepper. Cook them at the same  
time as the salmon, they will take  
anywhere from 10-20 minutes.

Optional side of [jasmine rice](#). It  
takes the same amount of time to  
cook (13 minutes). Refer to [page  
130](#) for cooking instructions.

Prepare a deep plate with the rice,  
salmon, and vegetables. Sprinkle  
with sesame seeds & enjoy.





# Ginger & Soy Sea Bass

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

2 sea bass fillet (sea bream and dover sole will work well here too)

### SAUCE:

3 Tbsp tamari or light soy sauce

1 Tbsp oyster sauce

1½ Tbsp sesame oil

1 tsp honey or maple syrup

1 thumb-size piece of ginger, grated

3 Tbsp water

½ tsp cornstarch

2 spring onions, finely diced

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 200°C

Whisk all sauce ingredients in a small bowl and set aside. Line a glass or ceramic baking dish with parchment paper that will fit your fillets lying flat, skin side down. Pour the sauce on top of the fish.

Bake in the oven on the middle rack for 12-15 minutes. Check on it after 12 minutes to see if the fish is cooked through – it should be flaky and pull apart very easily.

**\*Cooking tip:** if you are using a thicker piece of fish it will likely need the full 15 minutes to cook. If you are using regular sea bass, sea bream, or dover sole this is a much thinner fish and will most likely be ready after 12 minutes.

# Mediterranean Snapper

(SERVES 3-4)

## INGREDIENTS

500g red snapper fillet, deboned and skinned

200g green beans, trimmed

200g cherry tomatoes, sliced in half

1 brown onion, thinly sliced

## SAUCE:

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup olive oil

1 lemon, juiced

2 garlic cloves, crushed

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup dill, finely chopped

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  Tbsp ground coriander

1 Tbsp oregano

1 tsp sea salt

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp black pepper

Optional: 1 Tbsp tomato paste for extra flavour



## DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 175°C

Lay all the vegetables on a baking tray. Drizzle some olive oil and mix well with your hands until they are all coated. Sprinkle salt and pepper on top.

Bake the vegetables in the oven for about 20-30 minutes until you notice the cherry tomatoes are starting to crinkle and brown.

While the vegetables are in the oven, prepare the sauce by mixing all the ingredients in a bowl and whisking well.

Get the fish ready by taking it out of the fridge and cutting it into the fillet shape you want.

Remove the vegetables from the oven, place the fish on top of the vegetables and pour the sauce all over the fish and vegetables.

Use a spatula to make sure the sauce is evenly coating the fish. Sprinkle some extra salt and black pepper all over the fish and vegetables.

Return the tray to the oven for 15-20 minutes. If your fish is quite thin 15 minutes should be enough, if it's a thicker fish you might need to bake it for 20 minutes.

**Serving tip:** transfer the vegetables and the fish on to another serving dish. All the tomatoes seep into the sauce and that's where the flavor is. Using tongs, layer the vegetables on the bottom of the serving plate, then the fish on top. Then tilt the tray to get all the sauce and pour it over the fish.



# Crispy Fish Tacos

(SERVES 3)

## INGREDIENTS

### FISH:

800g fresh cod, filleted, deboned, and skinned (red snapper and Grouper work well here)

### BREADING STATION:

2 eggs, beaten in a bowl with some black pepper

½ all-purpose flour

1 cup of plain breadcrumbs seasoned with: 2 tsp paprika, 1 tsp turmeric, 1 tsp cayenne, 1 tsp garlic powder, 1 tsp onion powder, 1 tsp pink salt, ½ tsp black pepper

### GUACAMOLE:

2 ripe avocados

1 lime

Pink salt and pepper to taste

¼ red onion, finely diced (optional)

### PINEAPPLE SALSA:

1 cup pineapple, finely diced

1 jalapeno, finely diced (leave a few of the seeds in for extra spice)

½ lime, squeezed

Handful of parsley or cilantro, finely chopped

Pink salt and pepper to taste

### CABBAGE SLAW:

2 cups purple cabbage, shredded

3 Tbsp olive oil

1 Tbsp high grade maple syrup

Squeeze of lime

Salt and pepper to taste

### MAYO DRESSING:

2-3 Tbsp vegan mayonnaise

½ lime, squeezed

1 Tbsp olive oil

Sprinkle of cayenne & paprika

Pink salt to taste

### MAYO DRESSING:

Flour or Corn Tortillas (2-3 tortillas per person)

*\*I prefer soft flour tortillas that have minimal ingredients. You can also use corn tortillas or even lettuce wraps.*



## **DIRECTIONS**

Prep all the elements separately into individual serving bowls, prepare the fish at the end.

### **Cabbage slaw:**

Finely slice the cabbage length-wise so you have thin long strips and place in a large bowl. In a small dish mix all remaining ingredients. Dress the cabbage closer to serving time so it doesn't get soggy. Massage the dressing into the cabbage — this helps soften it.

### **Pineapple salsa:**

Chop the pineapple into small cubes and dice the jalapeño - taste as you go depending on how much heat you want. Add in all remaining ingredients, tasting and adjusting as you go. Should be sweet, sour, and spicy.

### **Guacamole:**

In a serving bowl, mash the avocados then add all the other ingredients.

### **Fish:**

You can either cook the fish in an air fryer or in the oven.

Cut the fish into even finger length pieces, about 1-inch wide.

Prepare your dipping station. Prepare a plate with the flour, a bowl with the beaten egg, and a plate with the seasoned breadcrumbs mixture.

Dip your fish into the flour, shake off the excess. Then dip it in the egg wash, wiping away excess liquid. Finally, dip it in the breadcrumbs. Make sure you coat very well and set aside. Continue for all pieces.

**Cooking in the oven:** preheat the oven to 200°C. Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Place the fish on the baking tray and spray with oil. Bake for 20 minutes flipping halfway through.

**Cooking in the air fryer:** place the fish into the air fryer basket, set the temperature to 200C. Spray with oil. Bake for 15 minutes total, flipping half way through.





# Fish Fingers

(SERVES 3-4)

## INGREDIENTS

800g fresh cod, filleted, deboned, and skinned

## BREADING STATION:

2 eggs, beaten in a bowl with ½ tsp of black pepper

1 cup all-purpose flour on a flat plate

Plain breadcrumbs seasoned with: ½ cup finely chopped dill, 1 Tbsp fine sea salt, ½ tsp of black pepper, on a flat plate

**Freezing tip:** these are great to freeze in batches for another time or for kids! You can throw them directly into the air fryer while frozen and follow the same instructions as explained above.

## DIRECTIONS

Cut the cod into even pieces, about a finger length and an inch wide.

Dip each piece into the flour mixture, coat it fully and shake off the excess. Then dip into the egg mixture making sure all sides are covered, then straight into the breadcrumb mixture and set aside. Do this with all pieces.

**For air frying:** set the temperature to 200°C and line them up in the basket making sure not to overlap them (you may need to do this in batches). Cook for 12 minutes total, flipping halfway through.

After the first round, make sure the thickest piece is fully cooked through, some air fryers may take a few extra minutes.

**For baking in the oven:** preheat the oven to 200°C and bake for 20 minutes flipping halfway through.

Serve with my home-made [French fries \(page 134\)](#) & enjoy!





# Prawn Curry

(SERVES 2-3)

## INGREDIENTS

12-15 fresh prawns,  
cleaned, de-shelled,  
no tails

### Vegetables:

1 brown onion, diced  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
2 cups snap peas  
2 cups baby corn

### Sauce:

1 can full fat coconut  
milk  
2 Tbsp mild curry  
powder  
1 Tbsp honey (or  
maple syrup)  
½ lime, squeezed  
1 Tbsp avocado oil or  
olive oil  
Pink salt to taste  
½ cup vegetable  
broth or water

## DIRECTIONS

Warm the oil in a deep saucepan then add the chopped onion and crushed garlic. Fry until fragrant.

Add 1 Tbsp of the curry powder and fry for about a minute.

Add the remaining vegetables and fry for an additional 3 minutes, mixing frequently.

Add the coconut milk and broth/water and bring to a boil for 3-4 minutes. Reduce to a simmer. Add the lime, honey, and remaining curry powder (be mindful as some curry powders are extremely spicy, so taste as you go). Add the pink salt to taste and keep on low heat for about 15 minutes until everything is soft.

Add in the raw prawns and cover the pot. Wait until prawns are pink and fully cooked through. This should only take a few minutes.

Serve on a bed of jasmine rice & enjoy!

# Chicken & Meat



# Chicken Fajitas

(SERVES 3)

## INGREDIENTS

### Chicken:

2 chicken breasts  
½ cup all-purpose flour seasoned with  
1 tsp pink salt  
2 Tbsp avocado oil (or olive oil)

### Vegetables:

2 Tbsp avocado oil (or olive oil)  
1 red bell pepper, sliced  
1 yellow bell pepper, sliced  
1 brown onion, sliced

### Seasoning:

1 tsp paprika  
1 tsp cumin  
1 tsp pink salt  
1 tsp cayenne  
2 tsp oregano  
½ cup water or vegetable broth

### Tortillas:

2-3 soft flour tortillas per person  
(or corn tortillas for a gluten free option)

### Guacamole:

2 ripe avocados  
1 lime, squeezed  
Pink salt and black pepper to taste  
¼ red onion, finely diced (optional)

### Tomato Salsa:

2-3 plum tomatoes, finely diced  
¼ red onion, finely diced  
½ lime, squeezed  
Pink salt and black pepper to taste  
Optional: a dash of chili flakes or hot sauce





## **DIRECTIONS**

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Mix all salsa ingredients in a bowl and set aside.

Prepare the guacamole by mashing the avocados and adding all remaining ingredients, then set aside.

Prepare a bowl with the flour and salt. Slice the chicken into long, thin, even slices. Dip the chicken into the flour, shake off any excess and set aside. Slice the vegetables into long thin slices and set aside. Mix all the seasoning in a small dish.

Heat the oil in a large pan. Cook the chicken for 3 minutes on each side until you get a nice brown coating. Once cooked, set aside for later.

In the same pan, add the remaining oil and add in all the vegetables and mix until they soften, about 5-6 minutes. Add the seasoning and mix until well coated. Add ½ cup of water or broth. Bring to a simmer for about 5-7 minutes until the liquid reduces.

Place the chicken back into the pan with the vegetables and mix all together. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Continue to cook on low heat until the liquid is almost gone, about 5-7 minutes.

Wrap your tortillas in aluminium foil. Place them in the oven 10-15 minutes before serving.

# Chicken Nuggets

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

2 chicken breasts

### Breading station:

1 egg, beaten with black pepper

½ cup all-purpose flour

1½ cup plain breadcrumbs seasoned with: 2 tsp pink salt, 2 tsp paprika, 1 tsp garlic powder, 1 tsp onion powder, 1 tsp oregano

### Dipping sauce:

2 Tbsp vegan mayo

1 tsp ketchup

1 tsp Dijon mustard

Sprinkle of pink salt

¼ tsp black pepper

\*Mix all in a small dish, adjust to your liking

## DIRECTIONS

**Breading station:** one bowl for flour, one for the beaten egg, the third bowl for the breadcrumbs and mix well.

Cut the chicken into 1-inch cubes or fingers.

Dip the chicken into the flour. Make sure it is well coated and shake off any excess. Then dip into the egg wash, make sure it's fully coated and wipe away any excess. Finally, dip into the breadcrumbs. Repeat for all.

Spray the chicken with some oil.

**To air fry:** fry for 12 minutes on 200°C, flipping halfway

**To bake:** bake for 20 minutes on 200°C, flipping halfway.

Serve with a side of baked French fries or mashed potatoes!



# Chicken Teriyaki

(SERVES 2-3)

## INGREDIENTS

### SAUCE:

1 orange, squeezed  
¼ cup tamari or light soy sauce  
3 Tbsp raw honey  
1 Tbsp ginger, grated  
1 Tbsp sesame oil  
1 Tbsp corn starch

### Chicken:

2 chicken breasts OR  
4 chicken thighs  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
1 Tbsp sesame oil

### Toppings:

Sesame seeds  
Diced spring onions

## DIRECTIONS

Mix all sauce ingredients in a bowl and set aside.

Prepare a bowl with the flour. Slice the chicken into small cubes and dip them into the flour shaking off any excess.

In a pan on high heat, add the sesame oil. Cook the chicken for 3 minutes on each side until almost fully cooked. Remove the chicken and set aside.

Add the sauce to the same pan, and bring to a boil, then reduce to low heat. The sauce should begin to thicken, whisk often so it doesn't burn.

Add the chicken back into the sauce and mix well. Simmer for about 3-4 minutes.

Serve on a bed of rice and top with sesame seeds and chopped spring onions.





# Chicken Meatballs

(SERVES 3)

## INGREDIENTS

400g minced chicken  
1 egg  
½ cup plain breadcrumbs  
3 spring onions, finely diced  
Handful of flat leaf parsley, finely chopped  
1 garlic clove, crushed  
1 tsp pink salt  
Black pepper

## SAUCE:

1 Tbsp avocado oil  
1 onion, diced  
3 Tbsp tomato paste  
3 cups chicken/vegetable broth or water  
1 tsp pink salt  
1 tsp oregano  
1 tsp dry basil  
½ tsp black pepper



## **DIRECTIONS**

Add all meatball ingredients to a large bowl, mix together using your hands until it is evenly combined. Roll the mixture into even ball shapes, it will make 16 meatballs.

In a large pan, heat one tablespoon of avocado oil. Once hot, add the meatballs. Brown the meatballs on all sides which will take about 10 minutes, the middle will still be a bit undercooked. Remove the meatballs from the pan and set aside.

In the same saucepan, heat one tablespoon of avocado oil and add in the diced onion, stir until translucent. Add the tomato paste and mix well for 3 minutes. Add 3 cups of broth or water and bring to a boil. Add the salt, pepper, and herbs. Let the sauce boil for 5 minutes.

Then, add the meatballs to the sauce and cover the pan. Reduce to low heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes.

After 15 minutes, taste and season as needed.

If you like a thicker sauce, uncover the pot for another 10 minutes and let the sauce thicken.

Serve on a bed of rice or quinoa & enjoy!



# Baked Chicken Thighs

(SERVES 2-3)

## INGREDIENTS

### Chicken:

6 drumsticks or 4 whole chicken legs  
1 tsp smoked paprika  
1 tsp onion powder  
1 tsp garlic powder  
1 Tbsp dried rosemary  
½ tsp pink salt  
½ tsp black pepper  
3 Tbsp avocado oil

### Vegetables:

1 potato, sliced  
1 sweet potato, sliced into round coins  
1 brown onion, roughly chopped

*\*Option to add any other vegetables you like*

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Mix the chicken with all the spices and oil in a large bowl.

Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Lay all the chopped vegetables on the bottom of the tray, sprinkle with some oil, sea salt, and black pepper. Lay the chicken on top and bake for an hour to an hour and 15 minutes, flipping halfway through.

Serve with a side of [jasmine rice](#).

**\*Cooking tip:** Use the marinade from the [Chicken Teriyaki](#) and marinate the drumsticks for a few hours in the fridge, then put them on a baking tray straight in the oven for 45 minutes to an hour flipping halfway.





# Chicken & Leek Pie

(SERVES 2-3)

## INGREDIENTS

### Shredded Chicken:

*I usually pre-make the chicken for this recipe, sometimes the day before.*

Whole chicken (1-1.2kg)  
Olive oil  
Pink salt & pepper

### Pie Filling:

3 leek stalks, chopped  
1 brown onion, diced  
1-2 garlic cloves, crushed  
2 Tbsp avocado oil  
½ - ¾ cup vegan cream\*  
½ - ¾ cup chicken broth

### Pie Topping:

7 ready rolled filo pastry sheets

### Seasoning

½ - 1 tsp white pepper  
½ tsp black pepper  
1 tsp onion powder  
1 tsp garlic powder  
1 tsp rosemary  
Pink salt to taste  
2 tsp corn starch

**\*Tip:** You can use any vegan cream. If not available, use any unsweetened plant milk, you may need additional corn starch to help thicken it.

## DIRECTIONS

Place the whole chicken in a ceramic pot, coat with olive oil, pink salt, and black pepper, then cover it with the lid. Bake it in the oven at 175°C for an hour covered then 30 minutes uncovered. Remove from the oven and set aside. Once the chicken is cool to touch, shred the breast and thighs using your hands and set aside.

*\*Tip: you can use the bones to make a broth.*

### Pie filling:

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

In a large deep pan, heat the oil. Add the leeks, onion, and garlic until they soften, mixing often for 10 minutes.

Add the shredded chicken (about 3 cups) to the onion mixture on medium heat. Add the broth, cream, and spices. Then add corn starch.

Taste and season. Add corn starch to thicken if needed. Transfer the filling to the 8-inch pie dish.

### Baking the pie

Once the filling has cooled, place a sheet of filo on top then brush it with egg wash or oil, then add a second layer of filo, repeat until there are seven sheets of filo.

Brush the pastry with oil or egg wash.

Bake for 20-25 minutes until the pastry is browned and looks crispy - keep an eye on it!

*\*Optional: you can make this with a puff pastry sheet. Make sure the pastry covers the entire pie dish and edges.*

*\*Baking tip: Place the pie dish onto a large baking tray to avoid the sauce dripping.*





# Wholesome Chicken Soup

(SERVES 3-4)

## INGREDIENTS

3 carrots, peeled and diced  
3 celery stalks, diced  
1 onion, diced  
3 cups of shredded chicken  
2 springs of fresh rosemary  
1 Tbsp dried oregano  
400ml chicken broth or more to  
cover the mixture by 1 cm  
1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar

\*Mix in a measuring jug:

2 Tbsp olive oil  
1 lemon, squeezed  
1 Tbsp honey  
1 tsp pink salt  
Sprinkle of black pepper





## DIRECTIONS

In a large pot (that has a lid) add a tablespoon of oil. Add the carrots, celery, and onion. Cook them until they're soft, mixing often.

Move aside the vegetables to create a space in the pot as you see in the photo on the left. Add the apple cider vinegar, let it reduce for a minute without mixing. Once it's reduced, mix all the vegetables with it.

Move aside the vegetables to create a space in the pot again, add the mixture from the jug and let it simmer and reduce without mixing for three minutes. Mix all together with the vegetables.

Add the shredded chicken followed by the broth, enough to cover the mixture by at least a centimeter. Add the rosemary. Bring to a boil then reduce to low heat and cover for 30 minutes.

After 30 minutes, taste and adjust seasoning if needed. Remove the stalks from the fresh rosemary.

**\*Optional:** add pasta or noodles to the soup as you serve. Avoid putting them in the main batch of soup as it won't sit well in the fridge.

**\*Cooking tip:** Using a ceramic pot or a Dutch oven for this recipe helps it cook a lot faster, if using a different kind of pot, it may need to simmer for longer than 30 minutes.

# Cashew Chicken

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

2 chicken breasts,  
cubed  
½ cup all-purpose  
flour  
1 red bell pepper,  
chopped  
1 yellow bell pepper,  
chopped  
1 red onion, chopped  
⅓ cup raw unsalted  
cashews

## Sauce

2 Tbsp sesame oil  
2 Tbsp rice vinegar  
6 Tbsp light soy  
sauce or tamari  
1 Tbsp honey  
1-2 garlic cloves,  
crushed  
1 Tbsp ginger, grated

## DIRECTIONS

Place the flour on a plate and dip each chicken cube into the flour, shaking off the excess. Chop the vegetables and set aside.

Add a tablespoon of sesame oil to a large pan on high heat, add the chicken and cook for 3 minutes on each side. Set aside.

To the same pan, add a tablespoon of sesame oil and vegetables. Mix for 5-7 minutes until they are soft.

Whisk all sauce ingredients together in a bowl and add it to the vegetables, reduce to medium heat. After 2-3 minutes, add the chicken back into the pan and leave it to simmer for 5-7 minutes until the sauce thickens, mix every few minutes.

Serve on a bed of jasmine rice and sprinkle with sesame seeds or spring onions, enjoy!





# MEAT

# *Ma'loubeh*

(SERVES 4)

## **MEAT PREPARATION & BROTH:**

500g lamb leg, cut into cubes  
1 onion, roughly chopped  
4 garlic cloves, peeled  
6 cardamom pods  
2 cinnamon sticks  
3 bay leaves  
1 tsp black peppercorns  
1 Tbsp sea salt  
1 Tbsp olive oil  
1.4L boiling water

## **VEGETABLES:**

2 large eggplants, peeled and cut into coins  
1 head of cauliflower, cut into florets

## **RICE:**

2 cups of jasmine rice, soaked in water for an hour  
1 tsp turmeric  
2 tsp seven spices  
2 tsp cumin  
Dash of cinnamon  
1 Tbsp pink salt

## **CUCUMBER MINT YOGHURT:**

1½ cups full fat yoghurt or plain soy yoghurt  
2 cucumbers, peeled and finely diced  
1 tsp salt  
1 lemon, squeezed  
2 Tbsp water  
2 Tbsp dried mint

*This is a recipe that everyone has their own twist on in our culture, it always turns out delicious in my opinion no matter who's making it. I've spoken to so many mothers, grandmothers and friends who make this dish and sort of came up with my own way of doing it and it is just too good not to share. This dish translates to 'upside down' in English, you'll understand why when serving it!*

## **TIPS:**

This dish takes a while to make. I suggest starting with the meat a couple of hours beforehand.

Using a Dutch oven or a ceramic pot will cook the meat and broth faster. The time that is recommended is applied if you are using a ceramic pot. If you're using a regular pot, add 30 minutes to the boil time.

For the meat, I recommend buying the lamb (or beef) from a good butcher and ask for the meat to be cut into cubes for you.

For the assembly, I prefer to use a stainless steel, 20cm pot.

**TO MAKE THIS PLANT-BASED:** substitute the meat broth with vegetable broth and skip the steps of cooking the meat.

Instead, follow the same steps for the eggplant and cauliflower. You can add potato coins and thin slices of tomato to the assembly process. For the potatoes, try pan frying them first before adding them to the pot, it's a great way to add more flavor!



## DIRECTIONS

### MEAT AND BROTH:

In a large ceramic pot add a tablespoon of olive oil on high heat. Then add the meat cubes and cook for 2-3 minutes, moving it around so it browns on all sides.

Once the meat is browned on all sides, add 1.4L of boiling water to the pot and let it come to a boil. Leave it to boil for 3-4 minutes. Reduce to medium heat.

A layer of pink and white froth forms on the top, scrape this off and discard it. This is the process of “cleaning” the meat. Repeat until the water in the pot is clear.

Add all the remaining broth ingredients and seasoning to the pot. Let it come to a high boil for about 2 minutes. Reduce to low heat and cover for an hour.

While waiting for the meat to cook, prep the vegetables and soak the rice.

After the broth is done, strain it into a large bowl. Set the meat cubes aside and discard the seasoning, onion and garlic.

### CUCUMBER MINT YOGHURT:

Mix all ingredients in a bowl, taste and season with more salt or lemon if necessary. Add 2 tablespoons of water. Add more if you'd like a runnier consistency. Keep it in the fridge until ready to serve.



## VEGETABLES & RICE:

While the meat is cooking, start with the other components.

Peel and slice the eggplant into round coin shapes and lay them on a large tray, sprinkle with salt and wait 20 minutes. This will draw out any moisture from the eggplant. After 20 minutes pat them dry.

You can bake, pan fry, or air fry the eggplant.

**For pan frying:** add 4-5 tablespoons of oil to a pan and cook the eggplant for about 3 minutes on each side until cooked through.

**For baking:** drizzle, or spray the eggplant generously with olive oil and bake at 175°C for 30 minutes, flipping halfway through. Once done, set aside.



Cut the cauliflower into florets, making sure each floret is sliced in half and has a “flat” side. In a large bowl, add the cauliflower, 1 tablespoon of olive oil, a sprinkle of salt, and cumin. Shake it until evenly coated.

You can bake or air fry the cauliflower.

**For baking:** lay the cauliflower on a large tray and bake at 175°C for 30-40 minutes until cooked through.

**For air frying:** set it to 160°C and air fry for 20 minutes until cooked through. Set aside once they are cooked.

The final step is to season the rice. Strain the rice in a large sieve and discard the water, give it an extra rinse, and shake out any excess water. Add the washed rice into a large bowl. Add all the seasoning to the rice and mix well.





**Now all the components are ready, let's get to the dish.**

In another large pot, drizzle a tablespoon of olive oil, make sure the entire bottom of the pot is coated with oil. This will help it flip more easily later.

You can layer the components any way you like. I like to start with covering the entire bottom of the pot with the eggplant. Then, I add the cauliflower and make sure it is an even layer on top of the eggplant.

Next, add the cooked meat cubes and spread them out evenly on top of the cauliflower. Finally, add all the rice on top of the meat. Using a spoon, spread the rice so that it is evenly laid out.

Make sure the layers are set and even. Once you're done with this assembly, you will not be mixing after this point.

Place the pot on the stove on high heat and add a liter of the meat broth. The rice should be completely covered with the broth. Bring to a boil, cover, then reduce to low heat and cook for 25 minutes.

After that, remove the pot from the heat but do *not* uncover it. Keep the lid on for an additional 10 minutes, allowing the rice to steam nicely.

Once you're ready to serve, uncover the pot. Using a plate larger than the pot, place it on top of the pot. Hold the handles of the pot and the plate together, sandwiching it. Finally, carefully but swiftly flip the pot. Refer to the image on the next page.

The pot will now be upside down on top of the plate, keep it there for 10 minutes before lifting the pot, this will help the rice hold its shape without collapsing. After 10 minutes have passed, slowly and carefully lift the pot.

Serve with the cucumber mint yoghurt on the side & enjoy!





Plant Based



# Creamy Tomato Pasta

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

3 cups of pasta

### Sauce:

250g cherry tomatoes, sliced in half

2 cloves garlic, crushed

4-5 Tbsp olive oil

½ - ¾ cup vegan cream or unsweetened plant milk

1 tsp pink salt

½ tsp black pepper

1 Tbsp dried basil

Optional: ¼ cup nutritional yeast

## DIRECTIONS

Heat the oil in large pan. Add the tomatoes and cook for 5-6 minutes until they release their juices and soften. Add the garlic and all seasoning followed by the cream or milk. Reduce to low heat. Once the sauce begins to thicken, taste and adjust seasoning if needed.

Using a high-speed blender, blend the sauce and add nutritional yeast, this will give it a cheesy taste. Blend until smooth.

Cook the pasta as per packet instructions until it is al dente.

Transfer two cups of the sauce back to the pan, add the pasta and mix well.

Store the remaining sauce in the fridge for up to 7 days!



# Pesto Pasta

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

2 cups fusilli pasta  
3-4 Tbsp vegan  
cream or oat milk  
½ cup pasta water

### **Pesto Sauce:**

3-4 cups basil leaves  
⅓ cup olive oil  
¼ cup pine nuts,  
toasted  
1-2 garlic cloves,  
peeled  
1 tsp pink salt  
¼ tsp black pepper

## DIRECTIONS

Blend the sauce ingredients in a high-speed blender and store in an air-tight jar in the fridge for up to 2 weeks. You can also freeze it in batches.

In a medium pot, bring 5 cups of water to boil with one tablespoon of pink salt then add the pasta.

Once the pasta is almost fully cooked, reserve ½ cup of the pasta water and set it aside, this is the only time you will salt the dish.

In a large pan on low heat, add 2 tablespoons of the pesto sauce, 3 tablespoons of vegan cream, and ¼ cup of the pasta water. Add more pasta water to get the desired consistency if needed. Whisk all together. Mix in the pasta.

Sprinkle with toasted pine nuts & enjoy!





# Ratatouille

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

1 zucchini  
1 eggplant  
1 tomato  
1 red onion  
6 mushrooms  
(optional)  
1 bell pepper  
1 garlic clove,  
crushed  
1 cup tomato  
Passata

### Seasoning:

1 tsp pink salt  
½ tsp black pepper  
2 tsp dried  
oregano  
2 tsp dried basil  
1 tsp dried  
rosemary

## DIRECTIONS

Chop all vegetables into equal chunks, about half a finger in size and set aside.

In a large pan heat up a tablespoon of oil and add the onion and crushed garlic. Mix for two minutes until fragrant.

Add the eggplant and zucchini and mix for 5-7 minutes until they're mostly cooked.

Add the bell pepper, mushrooms and tomato. Mix until everything looks cooked.

Add as much passata as you want, I usually start with one cup and adjust from there. Add all seasoning and mix.

Reduce to low heat and let simmer for about 10-15 minutes.

Taste everything as you go to see if more seasoning is needed!



Sides

# Milk Bread

(MAKES 9 BREAD ROLLS)

## INGREDIENTS

### Dough

300g bread flour  
1 Tbsp instant yeast  
1 tsp fine sea salt  
1 egg  
110g oat milk  
50g honey or maple syrup  
55g melted organic butter  
or coconut oil

### Roux

42g water  
42g oat milk  
14g bread flour

### Egg wash

1 egg yolk  
1 tsp oat milk

This recipe took a long time to learn. I had no experience making bread. So don't feel intimidated if this is your first time!

Nour Kanny, someone I consider my long-lost twin, taught me how to make this bread step-by-step all the way from Beirut via voicenote. This is an adaptation of her recipe with my healthy twist on it.

I use a stand mixer for this recipe. If you do it by hand, let me know how it goes!

I have a highlight on my Instagram [@layla.alnaif](https://www.instagram.com/layla.alnaif) under 'milk bread' if you need extra guidance.



## DIRECTIONS

### MAKING THE ROUX

In a small saucepan on medium heat, add all the roux ingredients and whisk until the flour is fully combined with the milk and water. Keep whisking until the mixture starts to thicken into a paste, it will take about 3 minutes. Once the mixture is holding its shape, remove from the heat and set aside.

### MAKING THE DOUGH

In the machine bowl with the dough hook attachment, add all dough ingredients and the roux. Using a spatula, mix all of the ingredients together until it forms a sticky dough texture. Attach the bowl to the machine and put it on maximum speed for 8 minutes, make sure you use a timer.

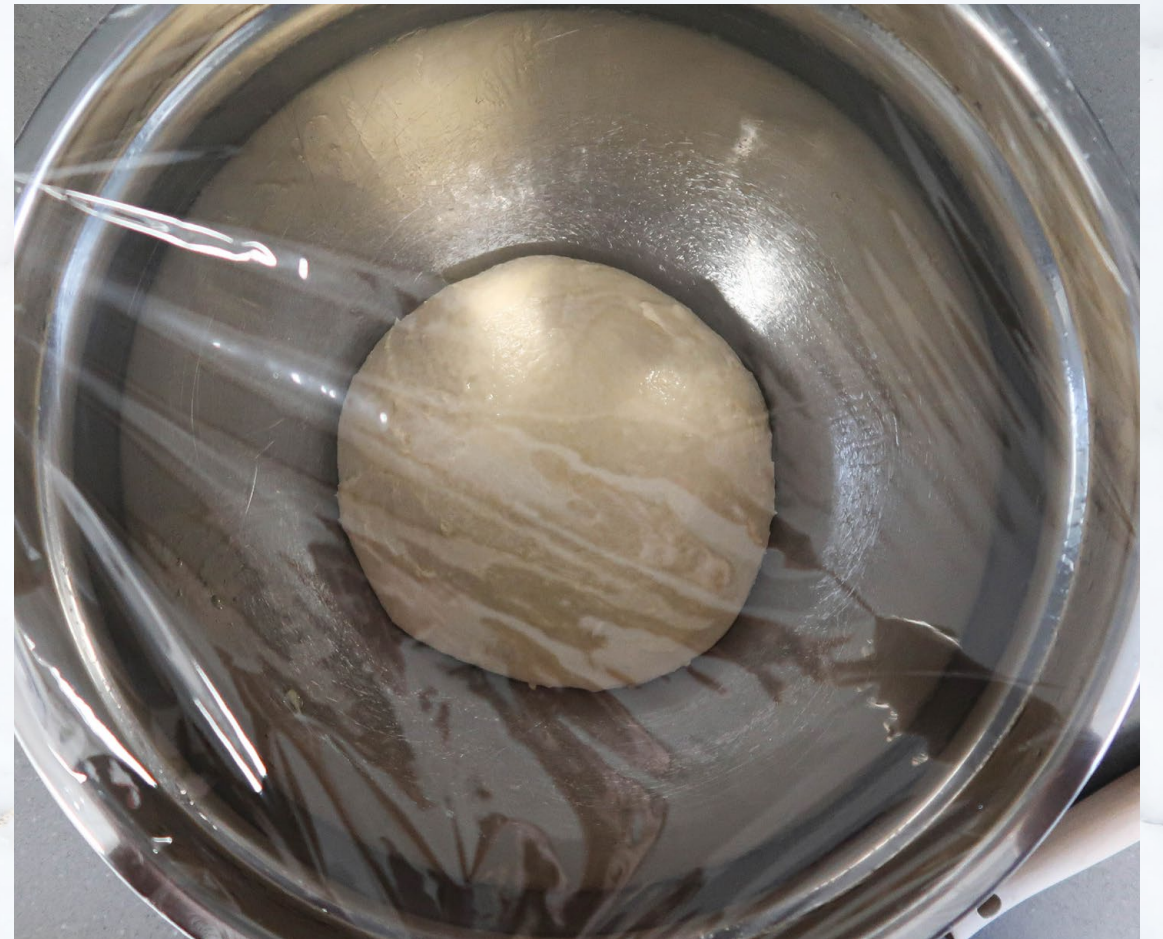
While the dough is mixing, drizzle and brush the oil in a separate large bowl to coat it evenly.

Once the timer goes off, remove the bowl from the machine. Oil your hands very well and remove the dough. Shape into a ball, then place it into the oiled bowl.

Cover with plastic wrap and proof for 1 hour and 15 minutes. If your kitchen is very cold I recommend leaving it for an additional 15 minutes.

Refer to the pictures on the next page. After proofing, the dough should at least double in size.





## DIVIDING THE DOUGH

Once it's done proofing, it's time to shape the bread.

For this recipe, there are many different ways to shape. The simplest way for me is to shape them into balls and get 9 rolls, which are the perfect size for sandwiches. I include other shaping methods on my Instagram highlight "milk bread" which you can refer to.

Prepare your 9x9 inch square pan by buttering the surface and sides, you can use parchment paper here as well.

Using your hands, remove the dough from the bowl and place it on the scale to measure the total weight. You want to divide the total weight by 9 and using a bench scraper or knife, cut the dough into 9 equal parts making sure you measure each one individually. The more equal each ball is the better!

If you want to stuff the bread with something, this is where you would do it. Some options include cheese, zaatar, chocolate spread, jam... feel free to experiment and send me your creations!



## SHAPING THE BREAD

On your countertop, lightly flour your surface. Using your hands:

- 1) Pull the sides of the dough outwards and then fold it back into the middle until you've created a round ball shape.
- 2) Then flip the ball (smooth side up) onto the floured area and cup your hands around the dough, and gently rotate the dough on its bottom to get a more even and round shape.
- 3) Place the ball into the pan and repeat this process for all nine rolls. Leave some space between the rolls so they can proof again and expand.





## BAKING THE BREAD

Once you shape all nine rolls, cover the pan with plastic wrap. Proof on the counter for 50 minutes.

While proofing, pre-heat the oven to 170°C .

In a small bowl, whisk an egg yolk and a teaspoon of oat milk together.

Uncover the pan and brush the egg mixture on to your rolls making sure to coat evenly.

Bake for 20-25 minutes until golden brown. Keep an eye on them, depending on the oven, they might need less or more time.

Once you get the color you want, a golden brown, remove from the oven and transfer to a cooling rack for at least 30-45 minutes.





# Jasmine Rice

(SERVES 2)

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup jasmine rice  
1 ½ cups water  
1 Tbsp oil  
1 tsp pink salt

## DIRECTIONS

Fill and boil your kettle. To a pot on the stove add a tablespoon of an oil of your choice, my preference is avocado oil. Add a teaspoon of pink or sea salt and the rice. Mix well. Add a cup and a half of boiling water and mix well again.

Bring to a boil, then immediately lower to the lowest heat and cover. Time 13 minutes. To get this rice extra fluffy, once the 13 minutes are up, remove the pot from the heat and keep the pot covered for an additional 10 minutes without opening at all. Then serve & enjoy!



# French Fries

## INGREDIENTS

2 potatoes, skin on  
2 Tbsp olive oil

### Seasoning

1 Tbsp smoked paprika  
1 Tbsp dried rosemary  
1 tsp pink salt  
½ tsp black pepper  
½ tsp onion powder  
½ tsp garlic powder

## DIRECTIONS

Pre-heat the oven to 200°C

Slice the potatoes into long and thin pieces and soak in a bowl for an hour.

In a small dish, add the seasoning ingredients and mix well.

Drain the potatoes and dry very well. There needs to be no moisture on the potatoes.

Put the potatoes in a large bowl. Add the oil and the seasoning then mix well.

**To air fry:** fry for 30 minutes on 180°C, flipping halfway

**To bake:** place the potatoes on a baking tray bake for 45 minutes on 200°C, flipping halfway.



A photograph of a glass display case filled with various traditional Southeast Asian desserts. The desserts are arranged on multiple levels and include items like cakes, pastries, fried items, and small treats. A person's hand is visible on the right side, holding a wooden bowl and using tongs to pick up a dessert. The word "Desserts" is written in a large, black, cursive font across the center of the image.

# Desserts

# Cashew Butter Cookies

## INGREDIENTS

### Wet Ingredients:

½ cup cashew butter (or nut butter of choice)  
2 Tbsp coconut oil, melted  
¼ cup maple syrup  
1 tsp vanilla extract

### Dry Ingredients:

1 cup gluten free oats  
3-4 Tbsp almond meal  
½ tsp pink salt

### Toppings of choice

Vegan dark chocolate, roughly chopped  
Raisins  
Coconut flakes

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 175C

Mix all the wet ingredients until smooth, add in the dry ingredients. Mix until fully combined.

Using an ice cream scooper, scoop into ball shapes onto a baking tray lined with parchment paper and flatten each one a bit with your hands, wetting your hands makes this easier and less sticky. Add the chocolate or toppings of choice on top.

Bake for 9-12 min, remove from the oven and leave them on the tray for at least 10 minutes before removing.



# "Snickers" Bars

## INGREDIENTS

### Base

1½ cups almond flour  
4 Tbsp coconut oil  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
½ tsp sea salt  
3 Tbsp honey or maple syrup

### Peanut butter filling

½ cup & 2 Tbsp smooth peanut butter  
3 Tbsp coconut oil  
4 Tbsp honey or maple syrup  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
½ tsp sea salt

*\*Option to roast one cup of raw peanuts in the oven for 15 minutes until brown at 200° and add them to the filling for extra crunch, I highly recommend doing this.*

### Chocolate topping

140g dark chocolate  
*\*70% vegan dark chocolate*



## DIRECTIONS

Preheat your oven to 175C.

Mix all base ingredients in a bowl until properly combined.



Line the pan with parchment paper (you can use a loaf pan or a small square tin) and press the mixture down until it looks firm and not crumbly, poke holes in the mixture using a fork. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove and set aside.



While that's baking, prepare your peanut butter filling by adding all ingredients to a small pan over medium heat. Once it starts to gently bubble, whisk constantly for 2 minutes then remove from the heat.





Once the crust has cooled slightly, pour the filling on top of the base, followed by the roasted peanuts if you are using them, and place in the freezer for 1 hour.

After that hour has passed, melt your chocolate in a bowl over the stove. Pour it on top of the peanut butter layer, and then store it in the freezer until the chocolate has set.

Cut into long snickers-like pieces, or small squares in an air-tight container in the fridge or freezer.





# Chocolate Fudge Brownies

## INGREDIENTS

### Wet Ingredients:

1 cup almond butter  
2 eggs  
¼ cup coconut sugar  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
¼ cup maple syrup  
1 Tbsp goats butter (coconut oil or regular butter work here)

### Dry Ingredients:

1 tsp baking soda  
⅓ cup cacao powder  
½ tsp pink salt

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## DIRECTIONS

Preheat your oven to 175C.

In a large bowl, mix all the wet ingredients together until smooth. Fold in the cacao powder, baking soda, then salt and mix well. Line an 8-inch square tin with parchment paper and pour the mixture in.

Bake for 19-22 minutes. Keep inside the pan for at least 30 minutes before removing. They should be fudgy and gooey, if you over-bake them they turn into a more cake-like texture.



# Pancakes

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup whole meal flour  
1 Tbsp baking powder  
Sprinkle of pink salt  
1 Tbsp olive oil  
1 Tbsp raw cane sugar or maple syrup  
1 egg (this recipe works well without the egg too)  
1 cup oat milk

\*Option to add 2 Tbsp of ground flaxseeds for additional fiber

### Toppings:

Dairy-free chocolate chips  
Sliced bananas

## DIRECTIONS

Mix all ingredients in a bowl using a whisk. Heat up a non-stick frying pan on medium to high heat.

Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the pancake mixture to the pan (should sizzle) and immediately place the toppings you want on top, if any (bananas or chocolate chips).

Wait about 2 minutes before flipping the pancake. Cook another 2-3 minutes and then remove and set aside.

Drizzle some maple syrup or honey on top and enjoy with a side of fresh berries!





# Cinnamon Banana Bread

## INGREDIENTS

### Dry ingredients:

2 tsp cinnamon  
1/8 tsp nutmeg  
1/2 tsp pink salt  
2 cups whole meal flour or  
gluten free flour  
1 tsp baking soda

*\*Optional: add 1/2 cup  
crushed walnuts or 1/2 cup  
raisins for extra flavor.*

### Wet ingredients:

3 bananas, mashed  
1/2 cup olive oil  
2 eggs  
1/3 cup coconut sugar\*

*\*For sweeter banana  
bread, add an additional  
1/4 cup of coconut sugar.*

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## DIRECTIONS

Preheat your oven to 175C.

In a large bowl whisk all wet ingredients and the sugar until fully combined. Fold in the dry ingredients. Mix slowly and gently, careful not to over-mix.

Spray the pan with oil or line with parchment paper. Pour the batter and bake for 45-50 minutes.

Leave the loaf in the pan for 5 minutes to rest before removing it to cool on a cooling rack. Let it rest for 20-30 minutes before slicing into it.



*I want to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported me throughout this process. My husband Omar for patiently waiting for me to take pictures of all our food before eating and always motivating me. My family and friends who continue to inspire and encourage me to continue doing what I'm doing. My Instagram family who none of this would be possible without, you guys are the best. For personal nutrition consultations, you can contact me directly at [info@laylaalnaif.com](mailto:info@laylaalnaif.com).*

*Layla x*