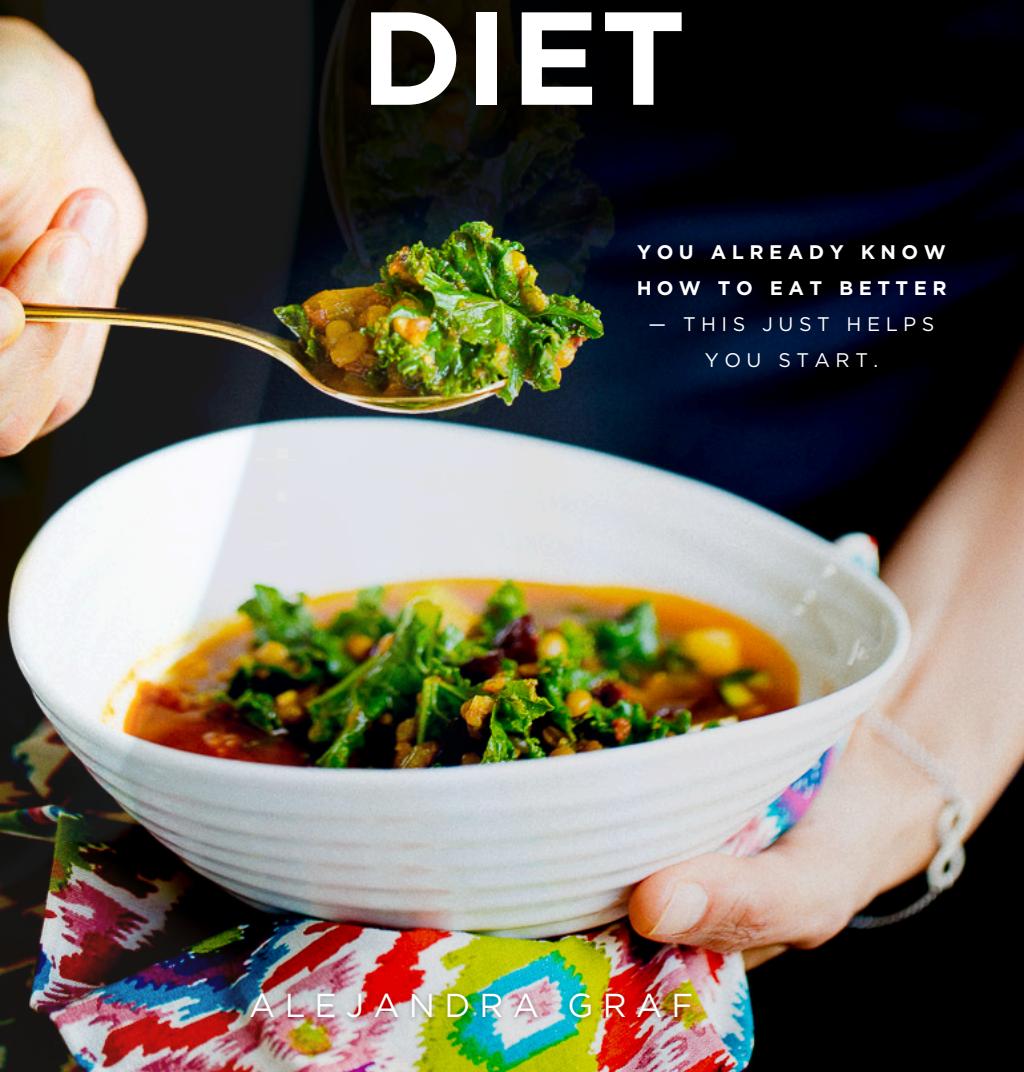


YOU DON'T NEED ANOTHER DIET

YOU ALREADY KNOW
HOW TO EAT BETTER
— THIS JUST HELPS
YOU START.



ALEJANDRA GRAF

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HI, I'M ALEJANDRA. I LOVE RUNNING, READING, COOKING, AND EATING.

ALECOOKS IS MY BLOG — IT'S WHERE I SHARE MY RECIPES, IDEAS, AND A LITTLE BIT OF MY LIFE. IT IS WHERE I BRING TOGETHER WHAT I'VE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS ABOUT EATING BETTER: LETTING GO OF OVERLY PROCESSED FOODS, GETTING CURIOUS AGAIN, AND RETURNING TO SIMPLE BASICS.

LESS IS MORE. I INVITE YOU TO TRY IT.

INTRODUCTION

I've always preferred taking things little by little — especially when it comes to changes that feel big or important.



When I ran a marathon, I didn't wake up one day and run 42 km. It took months of training, and it happened step by step.

Eating better has been exactly the same for me. I didn't wake up one day and remove everything "bad" from my kitchen, eliminate entire food groups, or suddenly know how to cook in a different way. It has been a process — **a series of small steps that brought me to where I am now.** It's taken years to build better habits at home, and I'm still refining them. I love continuing to learn — reading, watching documentaries, trying recipes, and staying curious.

But because **I made changes calmly — and because I gave my family time to adjust** — these habits became part of our lives in a way that actually feels sustainable.



INTRODUCTION

Changing the way we eat is hard.

And changing everything overnight is almost impossible.

You're the best person to decide how you want to make adjustments in your life and in your family's habits. Maybe you want to make big changes quickly. Or maybe you want to go little by little, like I did.

If you divide it into stages, you'll decide when to take the next step — and you'll progress at a pace that feels comfortable.



As I continued my studies, I began to understand the significant impact that processed foods can have on our bodies and our daily well-being. While I'm not a nutritionist or a doctor, I am a cook, I've discovered tips, recipes, and small adjustments that can genuinely make life easier. And make us feel amazing.

INTRODUCTION

I've found a way of eating that makes me feel energized and at peace. Not because it's perfect — but because I notice how my body responds when I eat simpler, more nourishing foods.

That's why I created this guide (and why I started my blogs): to share the steps I've taken, and to make starting feel less overwhelming. Maybe your first step is drinking water instead of soda. Maybe it's learning how to read labels. Maybe it's cooking one homemade meal a week. All of that counts.

This guide was born from the questions I get most often:

How do I start?

Where do I find information?

What book should I read?

What course should I take?

I've been living this lifestyle for many years, and I'm still learning every day. This guide is simply a summary of what I consider the most important pieces for building a healthier way of eating — in a realistic, human way.



INTRODUCTION

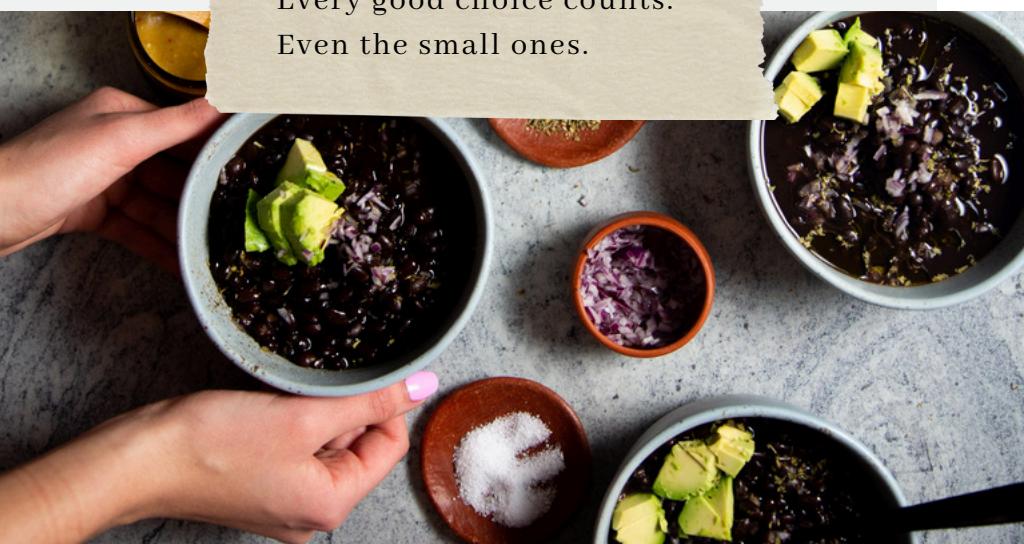
What you'll find here are the steps I've taken over time — and something I truly believe: one good change leads to another. This guide is here for you to take your habits as far as you want, in the way that feels right to you.

I can't (and won't) tell you what you should or shouldn't eat. You decide. If you're here, something in you is curious. Or ready. Or tired of feeling "off."

**WHATEVER BROUGHT YOU HERE — HONOR IT.
BE KIND TO YOURSELF.**

**IF YOU FALL BACK INTO OLD HABITS, IT'S OKAY.
START AGAIN.**

Every good choice counts.
Even the small ones.

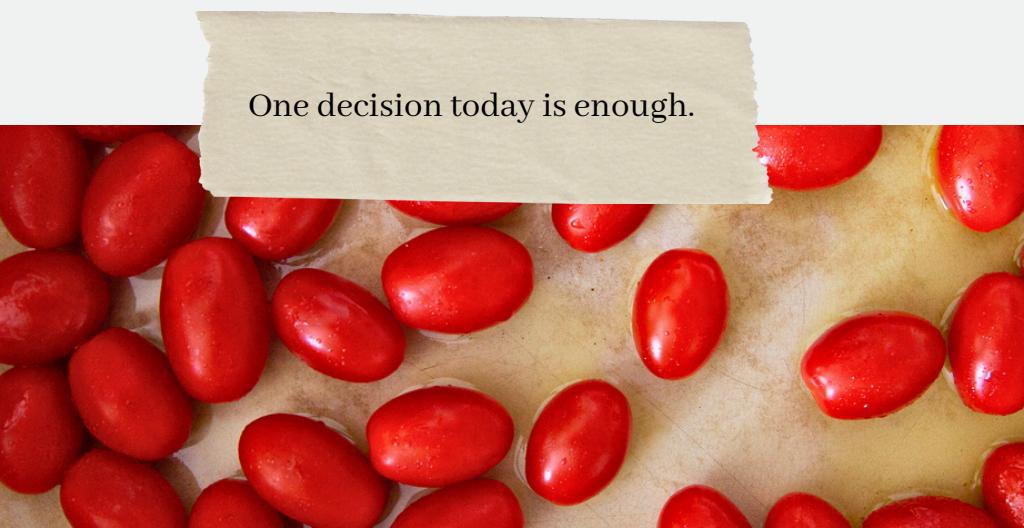


B R E A T H E A N D D E C I D E

Before making changes, take a moment to breathe and decide what you actually want. **This isn't about perfection — it's about intention.**

Ask yourself: Why do I want to eat better right now? Energy? Digestion? Hormones? Fewer chemicals? A calmer home? Feeling lighter? Sleeping better?

That reason matters. It becomes your anchor when you're tired, busy, or tempted to quit. And here's the best part: you don't need to change your entire kitchen in one day. You don't need to throw out half your pantry.



One decision today is enough.

CHECK YOUR PANTRY, DON'T THROW ANYTHING AWAY

Before you buy anything new, check what you already have. Don't throw things away out of guilt or panic. Use what you have, little by little. And as you finish something, replace it with a better option. This is how change becomes sustainable.

For example:

- If you finish a processed cereal → maybe you replace it with oats, simple granola, or a cleaner brand you trust.
- If you finish a refined oil → you replace it with a clean oil you feel good using every day.
- If you finish something in your pantry that you wouldn't buy again → perfect. That's information. Now you know.
- Gradually, your pantry evolves — and you can do it without creating waste. There is no rush. You are already heading in the right direction.



LET'S READ LABELS

(LESS FEAR, MORE CLARITY)

Another important part of eating better is understanding what's actually inside packaged foods.

A cereal, for example, might contain sugar, corn, soy, and canola oil. You recognize those words, you can pronounce them — but that doesn't mean they're nourishing in the way your body needs. A lot of packaged foods are built around cheap ingredients, heavy processing, and marketing.

So here's my approach:

- Use your judgment. Trust your intuition. Don't let packaging decide for you.
- And if you buy something and later regret it? Don't stress. Just don't rebuy it. That's still progress.

"The more ingredients a packaged food has, the more likely it is to be highly processed." — Michael Pollan



Also: be careful with the promises printed on the front of the box.

"Extra fiber," "packed with omegas," "vitamin-rich," "low-fat"... sometimes those claims are just distractions.

I'll never forget a friend buying gummy vitamins for her kids because the front of the package looked so convincing. When I read the ingredients, it was basically sugar, coloring, and flavoring. But the marketing made it feel like a responsible choice.

That's why I always come back to this:

A broccoli doesn't need a marketing label. An apple doesn't need a stamp. Real food doesn't have to convince you.



WHICH INGREDIENTS SHOULD I AVOID?



Learning to read labels helps you spot what shows up again and again — and what you may want to avoid, especially if it's part of your everyday routine.

Here are the ingredients I personally try to avoid as much as possible:

1. High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) It's a cheap, highly processed sweetener used in many packaged foods and drinks. Sometimes it shows up under different names.

2. Added sugars (and all their disguises). Sugar adds up fast, especially in foods that don't even taste "sweet" (sauces, breads, yogurts, snacks). Kids especially get hit hard by this, because sugar affects energy, mood, sleep, and cravings.



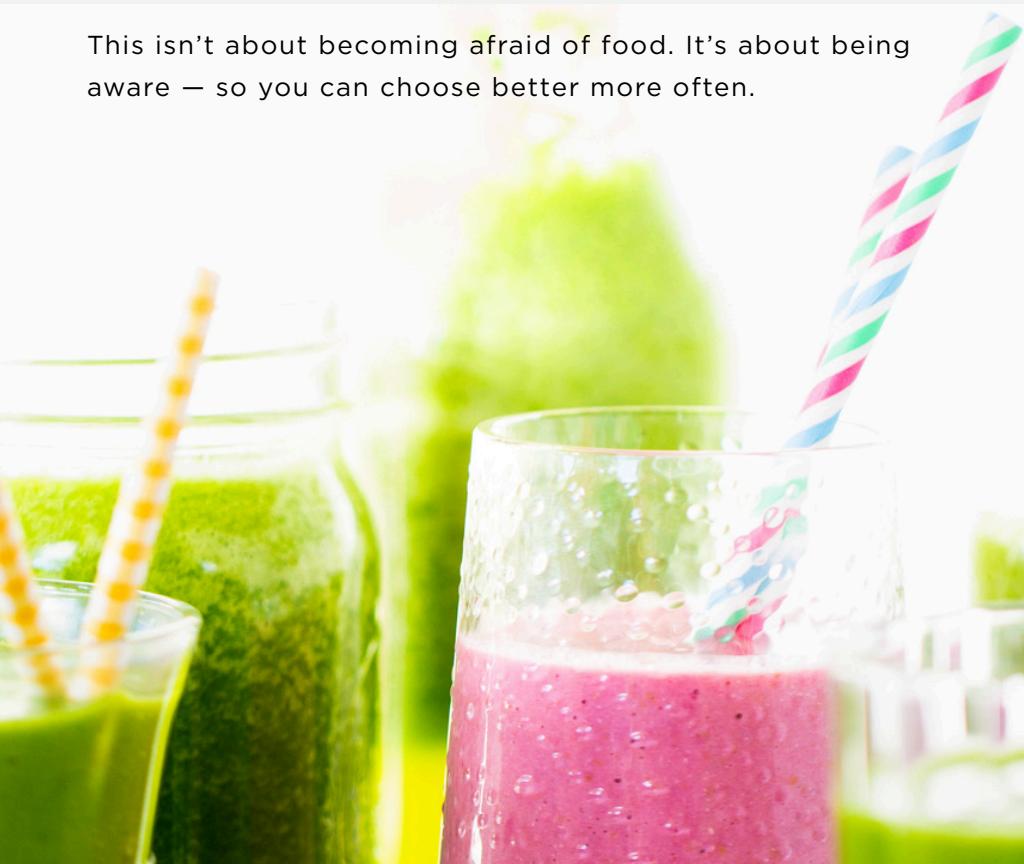
3. Artificial sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, saccharin, acesulfame potassium)

4. Artificial colors and natural flavors

5. Hydrogenated oils / trans fats (especially "partially hydrogenated")

6. Excess sodium and preservatives in heavily processed foods

This isn't about becoming afraid of food. It's about being aware — so you can choose better more often.



HOW TO SHOP AT THE SUPERMARKET



When you walk into a supermarket, a straightforward rule helps a lot: try to shop mostly around the outer edges of the store.

That's usually where you'll find:

- fresh fruits
- vegetables
- whole foods
- ingredients that look like... food



The center aisles are often filled with boxed, bottled, and highly processed products. That doesn't mean you'll never go there — it just means you go in with intention.

A few things that help:

- I choose foods with short ingredient lists.
- I buy seasonal produce when possible — it usually tastes better and costs less.
- If organic fits your budget, great. If not, don't let that stop you from eating fruits and vegetables.

And always remember: packaging can be loud and convincing. Flip the product over and read the ingredients. That's where the truth is.

Little decisions, repeated every time you shop, slowly shape the way you eat at home.

INSTEAD OF...

Once you understand labels and have a clearer idea of what "real food" looks like, this part becomes fun.

Instead of thinking in terms of restriction, think in terms of swaps.

For example:

👉 Instead of commercial bouillon powders or flavor cubes full of additives, try using homemade broth — vegetable, chicken, or beef, depending on how you eat.

If making broth feels like too much right now, look for brands with simple ingredients, less salt, and no artificial flavorings.

And don't underestimate herbs. Fresh or dried herbs add incredible flavor and real benefits, and they make simple food feel special.



👉 Instead of always reaching for white rice, try brown rice. At first, it may feel different — but little by little, many people end up preferring it.

And once you're comfortable, explore:

- **Jasmine rice**
- **Basmati**
- **Short grain**
- **Long grain**
- **Red or black rice**

Each one has a different texture and personality.

👉 Instead of iodized table salt with additives, try sea salt. And for pepper — buy peppercorns and grind them yourself. The difference in flavor is huge.

Also, take a look at your spices. Ideally, they should contain one ingredient — the spice itself. No fillers, no extras.

If you feel like it, grow a few herbs at home. Even a small pot of basil, mint, cilantro, or thyme can completely change the way you cook.



👉 Instead of margarine that promises everything and tastes like butter without being butter, choose good fats:

- **Olive oil**
- **Avocado oil**
- **Coconut oil**
- **Real organic butter**

I like oils that feel so clean. I could use them on my skin, too.

👉 Instead of pre-made chocolate milk full of sugar, make it at home: unsweetened cocoa powder + a little maple syrup + milk of your choice.

👉 And when you make pasta, look for options made with better grains or legumes. You don't have to switch everything — just start noticing what's available.



LET'S GO SHOPPING

Now that you have the basics, let's actually go shopping.

Fill your pantry with foods that nourish you:

- **Fresh fruits**
- **Fresh vegetables**
- **Ingredients from different cultures**
- **New flavors you're curious about**

Go with a clear mindset — not perfection, just intention.

Below is a seasonal produce list. It may vary depending on where you live, but it's a great starting point.



Produce

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Fresh herbs
- Garlic, onion, leek, shallots

Condiments

- Sea salt
- Miso
- Tamari
- Mustard
- Soy sauce

Vinegars

- Rice vinegar
- Champagne vinegar
- Red wine vinegar
- Apple cider vinegar

Pasta & Bread

- Pasta: whole wheat, quinoa, brown rice, chickpea
- Sprouted grain bread
- Seed crackers

Legumes

- Beans of all kinds, colors, and shapes
- Chickpeas
- Lentils: green, red, black, large, small, and sprouted
- Dried green and yellow split peas

Sweeteners

- Maple syrup
- Cane sugar
- Agave syrup

Oils & Fats

- Avocado oil
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Toasted sesame oil
- Coconut oil

Grains

- Oats
- Rice
- Millet
- Quinoa
- Farro
- Amaranth

Nuts & Seeds

- Almonds
- Cashews
- Walnuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Hemp seeds
- Pumpkin seeds

Plant-Based Milks & Liquids

- Coconut milk
- Almond milk
- Rice milk
- Coconut water

Spices

- Cinnamon
- Turmeric
- Coriander seeds
- Cumin
- Dried chili
- Cayenne
- Black pepper

Frozen Fruit

- Strawberries
- Blueberries
- Cherries
- Raspberries
- Mango
- Pineapple
- Açaí

Flours

- Whole wheat flour
- Spelt flour
- Oat flour
- Almond flour
- Corn flour
- Chickpea flour

Sweets

- Dark chocolate
- Dark chocolate chips



Dried Fruit

- Dates
- Raisins
- Shredded coconut



Nut & Seed Butters

- Almond butter
- Peanut butter
- Tahini
- Cashew butter



Canned Goods

- Canned beans
- Canned chickpeas
- Canned San Marzano tomatoes
- Tomato paste



Chili Sauces

- Gochujang
- Sambal oelek
- Chipotles
- Sriracha
- Chili garlic sauce
- Macha ([here](#) is how to make it!)

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Every season brings different foods, and each one offers something unique.

Eating seasonally helps you:

- Enjoy better flavor
- Save money
- Get more nutrients
- Avoid food boredom

I like to think in colors. Each color represents different nutrients and antioxidants.

A simple guideline:

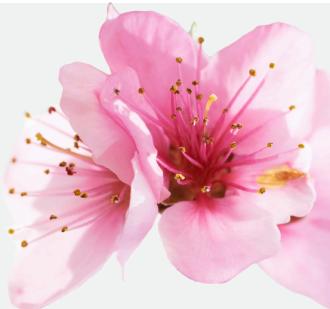
the more color on your plate, the better.

This isn't about rules — it's about curiosity and variety.



SEASONAL PRODUCE

Spring Produce



Vegetables

- Asparagus — Conventional is fine (thick stalk, low residue)
- Artichokes — Conventional is fine
- Peas (snap, snow, English) — Organic preferred (thin skin, eaten whole)
- Radishes — Conventional is fine
- Spring onions / green onions — Organic preferred
- Leeks — Conventional is fine (outer layers removed)
- Fava beans — Conventional is fine
- Spinach — Organic strongly recommended (high pesticide residue)
- Arugula — Organic preferred

Fruits

- Strawberries — Organic strongly recommended
- Cherries — Organic preferred
- Apricots — Conventional is fine



Summer Produce

Vegetables

- Tomatoes — Organic preferred
- Zucchini & summer squash — Organic preferred
- Eggplant — Organic preferred
- Bell peppers — Organic strongly recommended
- Cucumbers — Organic strongly recommended
- Corn — Organic recommended (often GMO if conventional)
- Green beans — Organic preferred
- Okra — Conventional is fine

Fruits

- Blueberries — Organic strongly recommended
- Raspberries — Organic strongly recommended
- Blackberries — Organic preferred
- Peaches — Organic strongly recommended
- Nectarines — Organic strongly recommended
- Plums — Organic preferred
- Watermelon — Conventional is fine (thick rind)
- Cantaloupe — Conventional is fine

Fall Produce

Vegetables

- Pumpkin — Conventional is fine
- Winter squash (butternut, acorn, kabocha) — Conventional is fine
- Sweet potatoes — Organic preferred
- Carrots — Organic preferred
- Beets — Organic preferred
- Cauliflower — Organic preferred
- Brussels sprouts — Organic strongly recommended
- Kale — Organic strongly recommended

Fruits

- Apples — Organic strongly recommended
- Pears — Organic preferred
- Grapes — Organic strongly recommended
- Pomegranates — Conventional is fine
- Figs — Conventional is fine





❄ Winter Produce

Vegetables

- Cabbage — Conventional is fine
- Broccoli — Organic preferred
- Cauliflower — Organic preferred
- Leeks — Conventional is fine
- Onions — Conventional is fine
- Turnips — Conventional is fine
- Parsnips — Organic preferred
- Potatoes — Organic preferred (absorbs chemicals through skin)

Fruits

- Oranges — Conventional is fine (thick peel)
- Mandarins — Conventional is fine
- Grapefruit — Conventional is fine
- Lemons — Organic preferred (zest often used)
- Limes — Organic preferred
- Kiwis — Conventional is fine

Quick rule of thumb (easy to remember)

- Thin skin, eaten whole → organic when possible
- Thick peel or outer layers removed → conventional is fine
- Leafy greens & berries → prioritize organic
- Citrus for juice only → conventional is okay; for zest → organic

HOW MANY FRUITS AND VEGETABLES DO I NEED TO EAT?

This is one of the questions I hear most.

The honest answer?

Probably more than we think — and with more variety.

Most people don't avoid fruits and vegetables on purpose. They just don't have them ready, visible, or easy to grab.

Small habits help:

- Adding fruit to breakfast
- Keeping washed produce in the fridge
- Including at least one vegetable at lunch and dinner

Over time, fruits and vegetables stop being "extra" and become the basis of your meals.



If you can't find a fruit fresh, buy it frozen.

Don't be afraid of frozen produce — buy it confidently, as long as it doesn't have added ingredients.

Frozen fruits and vegetables are picked at their peak, when they're at their best, and frozen immediately. According to Marion Nestle in her book *What to Eat*, this is the ideal order for buying fruits and vegetables:

- Organic and local
- Organic
- Local
- Conventional
- Frozen
- Canned

Eating with the seasons matters. Seasonal produce is usually more affordable, tastes better, and has far more nutrients than food that's been shipped and stored for long periods of time. One very important point: buy organic whenever you can. Look for quality over quantity.

There's a lot of misinformation around organic food. Some people abuse the term and slap "organic" on everything, while others claim that nothing is truly organic anymore. What is true is that organic products contain far fewer pesticides and chemicals than conventional ones.

Yes, organic food can be more expensive, although that really depends on where you shop — sometimes the price difference is smaller than you'd expect. Still, I truly believe it's worth investing in your health. What doesn't make sense to me is spending thousands of dollars on material things but hesitating to buy an organic head of lettuce.

What you don't invest today in good, nourishing food, you'll end up paying for later in medications and doctor visits.

Buying organic isn't a trend for rich people, hippies, or "crazy" health fanatics. Buying organic simply means eating the way food used to be grown — before massive companies tried to "save the world" with super-powered seeds. Organic farming shows more respect for the land and allows for proper crop rotation to grow the best food possible.

Many studies are showing how children's bodies accumulate harmful substances from pesticides. The body doesn't know what to do with these toxins, so it stores them, sometimes leading to illness over time.

That's why I believe buying organic whenever you can is a great idea. And when you can't, or you simply can't find it, wash your fruits and vegetables thoroughly. Peeling them is even better, especially when they come from heavily treated fields.

Every year, the **Environmental Working Group (EWG.org)** publishes a list showing which fruits and vegetables are the most contaminated and which are the least.

My friend Morena Escardó explains in her book Detox Juicing that the best way to wash fruits and vegetables is to soak them in a salt and lemon solution. She suggests placing all the produce you want to wash in your kitchen sink, filling it with water, adding four tablespoons of salt and the juice of half a lemon, and letting everything soak for five to ten minutes. Then rinse with filtered water.

You can also use special produce washes, or make your own at home using one part vinegar to three parts water for thick-skinned vegetables and citrus. What's most important is never using dish soap or antibacterial cleaners — they're toxic and leave residue on food.

Once your produce is clean, dry it very well and refrigerate anything that spoils quickly. I dry leafy greens really well, wrap them in paper towels, and store them in a bag. There are also excellent reusable bags designed specifically for storing fruits and vegetables.

Herbs like cilantro, parsley, basil, and others I wash right before using. If there's leftover, I wrap them in paper towels and store them in the refrigerator.

What I don't refrigerate are potatoes, onions, garlic, avocados, apples, oranges, lemons, watermelon, pineapple, and bananas — unless they're already cut or very ripe, in which case they should go in the fridge.

Beyond knowing how to wash fruits and vegetables properly, it's also important to be mindful of how much to eat, what reasonable portions look like (please don't weigh or measure — portions are approximate), and what actually counts as a serving.

Remember: what matters most is eating as close to nature as possible.

STARTING MY MORNING

— WHAT'S IDEAL VS
WHAT'S REAL?

We all imagine the perfect morning — calm, organized, nourishing.

Real life is different; it can be chaotic. Still, mornings matter. They set the tone for the rest of the day.

Simple things help:

- Preparing something the night before
- Drinking water as soon as you wake up
- Keeping breakfast options simple

**A good morning doesn't mean doing everything "right."
It means giving your body a decent start.**



BREAKFAST WITHOUT THE TYPICAL CEREAL BOX

Breakfast doesn't need to be complicated, expensive, or sugary.

At home, I rely on simple things:

- Oatmeal or chia prepared the night before
- Leftover grains eaten like porridges
- Frozen fruit for smoothies

Cooking a little extra on purpose is one of my favorite tricks. Yesterday's rice or quinoa becomes tomorrow's breakfast with fruit and milk.

The goal isn't variety every day — it's nourishment and consistency.



THE BEST WAY TO ORGANIZE THE WEEKLY MENU

Planning your meals doesn't mean cooking elaborate dishes every day.

It simply means removing stress.

I like rotating meals: pasta night, taco night, soup night, leftovers night. Over time, you find a rhythm that works for your home.

When meals are planned, cooking feels lighter — and eating well becomes easier.



THE BEST UTENSILS FOR COOKING

You don't need a kitchen full of gadgets.

A few good tools make all the difference:

- A sharp knife
- Solid cookware
- Glass containers
- A blender

When cooking feels easier, you do it more often — and that alone improves how you eat.



GRAINS, LEGUMES, OILS & FATS

Whole grains and good fats are essential. They provide energy, keep you satisfied, and support overall health.

You don't have to master everything at once. Try one new grain at a time. Mix familiar with new. Experiment.

The same goes for oils. Each one behaves differently and brings something unique to your food.

There's no right or wrong — just learning.



EATING AS A FAMILY

People often think kids who eat vegetables were "born that way."

They weren't.

Kids learn by watching. They learn by repetition. They learn by environment.

Eating together, without pressure, helps everyone tune in to hunger and fullness. I prefer letting my kids serve themselves and stop when they feel satisfied — not when the plate is empty.

Food shouldn't be a power struggle.



WATER — HYDRATION

Water affects everything: digestion, mood, energy, and focus.

It's one of the simplest habits — and one of the most powerful.

I avoid bottled drinks when possible and keep water visible and accessible at home. Kids learn this, too.

When in doubt, start with water. Water with lemon juice is also a great way to start your day!



"WE ALL HAVE OUR MOMENTS

In the journey of feeding my family and myself better with cleaner ingredients and a healthier diet. I've been on both ends — **too relaxed and too extreme.**

Neither worked.

Being rigid didn't help my family or my peace of mind.
Balance did.

Eating better is a long game. Consistency matters more than control.

At home, we focus on example, not lectures.

We aim for balance — not deprivation.
The 80-20 approach keeps things realistic and sustainable.

SHALL WE BEGIN?

Yes. Begin now.

One change at a time. One decision at a time.

Celebrate every step — even the small ones.

If you fall off, start again. You already know how.

And if this guide helped you, could you share it? Talk about it. Pass it on.

Eating better spreads best when we do it together.

