


A close-up photograph of a white ceramic bowl filled with a thick, creamy, light-colored soup. The soup is garnished with a drizzle of golden olive oil, finely chopped green herbs, and small pieces of red and orange vegetables. The bowl sits on a light-colored, textured surface, possibly a lace doily. In the background, a small glass bowl containing yellowish-green food is partially visible.

# SAD TO FAB

FIVE FOODS TO GET YOU FEELING GREAT

*from* STEPHANIE STIAVETTI

FEARLESS  FRESH



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# WELCOME, MY FRIENDS!

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I'm so excited to have you here. *Sad to Fab* is the very first ebook in a series of many I'm planning to publish, so this particular project is very special to me.

My goal is to help you love the food you eat. Why is this so important? Because when you love what you eat, you're a happier person overall. You step out of meals refreshed and enlivened, satisfied and feeling great. You actively put more good things into the world, and when you're feeling amazing, those around you can't help but feel good, too.

Doesn't that sound like a great way to live? It sure does to me!

This ebook is the first step on a path towards a happier, more fulfilling life. The food you eat has the power to shape every other aspect of your existence: physical, mental, and emotional. The gas you put in your tank is the very first step in every process.

## A PROFOUND, UNAVOIDABLE TRUTH

Here's one truth you may not have considered, unless you've got a background in nutrition: Food is energy in a physical, tangible form. That's all it is. High-quality foods burn into cleaner energy, giving you drive and clarity, while crappy foods bog your body down with all sorts of waste and biproducts.

These biproducts have to go somewhere, right? They don't just disappear into the ether. Your body works hard to get rid of what it can, and the rest sets up

shop in your liver, fat stores, and other places around your body.

This process of expelling biproducts takes an insane amount of energy – energy that *could* be used by your brain, your muscles, or your heart. If you eat poorly for long enough, your body becomes a mini HazMat zone and leaves you tired all the time. Gross. Exhausted and fatigued do NOT make you happy, the last time I checked.

## THE CARS THAT GO BOOM

Do you think the guys that run NASCAR tracks stop at the local Shell station to fill the tanks of the race cars? Nope. That would be crazy. There's no way those high-tech engines would be able to perform with sub-par gas in the tank. They burn clean, high-end fuel because they need to operate at peak conditions.

If you put regular gas in a performance engine, the parts of the car break down, usually when they're under extreme pressure and needed the most. (Can you tell I come from a long line of auto mechanics? I learned to change the oil on an 8-cylinder engine before I even knew how to drive! Thanks, Dad. ;)

Your body is high-performance race car, a precision instrument that you expect to perform at a moment's notice. It's the most important vehicle you will ever drive. Your engine needs crazy high-quality jet fuel, not whatever's cheapest at the gas station closest to your freeway exit.

## A DELICIOUS PROMISE

So where does all this leave you if, A) you don't know how to cook, B) don't like to cook, or C) you don't have the time or energy to cook?

That's why I'm here. I've spent over a decade teaching folks how to feed themselves without a ton of time, energy, or effort on their part. The best food is simple to make, and simple to eat. It doesn't take all day to prepare, and it doesn't require a culinary degree to figure out the recipes. If you know how to put a spoon in a bowl and stir, that's all the skill you need.

Operating as a complete one-day meal plan, this ebook will teach you how to cook a handful of very simple dishes, one for each part of your day, that will leave you feeling energetic and alive. These recipes are infused with "happy foods," with the main ingredient in each dish having an inherent property to bring about positive changes in your body and your mood.

Check them out:

**Oats:** High in fiber, promoting good gut flora and feeds what scientists now call "your second brain."

**Blueberries:** Super effective antioxidant bombs, fighting cellular damage and increasing brain power.

**Yogurt:** Your gut's BFF, full of giddy little probiotic friends that aid in digestion and immune function.

**Basil:** Acts as a natural antibacterial, anti-inflam-

matory, and the scent has been used for millennia to promote a sense of wellbeing.

**Chocolate:** A dopamine shot plus a sidecar of antioxidants. I don't have to tell you that chocolate is medicine (in moderation of course).

### **DISCLAIMER: DIETS CAN GO F\*\*\* THEMSELVES.**

You might have noticed that I didn't use the word "diet" anywhere in the past few pages. There's a reason for that. I don't believe in a dogmatic approach to eating. Life is too short to stress on something that is such a big part of your everyday life.

I adhere to a more relaxed approach to food, and I definitely believe in special treats as a matter of course. (Dessert is not a crime!) My background is in gourmet cooking with a severe predilection for

comfort foods, and I've got to stick to my roots, yo! It's my top priority that these recipes taste good above all else, with the added bonus that they're good for you, too.

I won't push you into anything you're uncomfortable with, or anything you're not ready for. The point of this book is *ease*, so there will be no drama or

***"The point of this book is ease, so there will be no drama or judgment."***

judgment. I can tell you one thing, though: the more you learn to cook, the more you'll understand how your body processes different kinds of foods, and the more you'll be empowered to make your own nutritional decisions -- regardless of which foodie freak flag you fly.

And that's my number one goal for you: That you will be present, prepared, and savvy enough to glide effortlessly through your own personal eating culture, so that panic, shame, and that hangry\* feeling do not exist in your food world. Everything is a decision, and flexibility is your friend.

\*Hangry: This is my favorite term right now. It means hungry-angry, also known as that "I'm going to run you over with my car if you don't feed me right now" feeling. Not that I've ever been there.



# WHO AM I?

You might be wondering who the hell I am to be making all of these assertions. First off, I'm a cookbook author and ten-year veteran food writer. My work has appeared in major outlets such as *NPR*, *The Smithsonian*, *New York Magazine*, and a host of others. I've made a career out of developing recipes for major brands, such as the National Pork Board and McCormick Spices. My first book, *Melt: the Art of Macaroni and Cheese* was released in 2013 on Little, Brown, & Company. I've spoken at countless food conferences, in both public and professional forums.

But before any of that could happen, there's an overdramatic tale.

## HEALTH DRAMARAMA

I was raised on crappy processed food. For all of my childhood, I lived almost entirely on canned vegetables, frozen dinners, cookies, ice cream, and boxed macaroni and cheese. I grew up thinking Rice-A-Roni was its own food group. I wish I were kidding.

Of course these eating habits followed me into adulthood, and as a busy young tech professional in the corporate world, I enjoyed my big-city life while subsisting on burritos, cheap pizza, and Chinese food delivery.

Add to that the fact that I was living the crazy life of a San Francisco 20-something, hitting every party I could and staying up all night with whatever party favors I had handy. I was having a hell of a time, living it up to my max capacity. But the rock star lifestyle

seriously kicked me in the ass.

Live fast and you'll never die, right? Wrong!

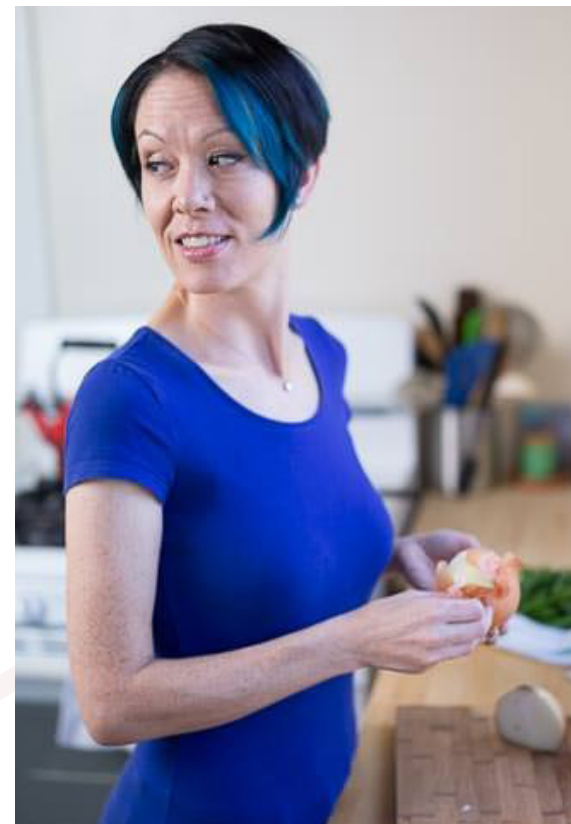
## CUE THE SAD TROMBONE

Things fell apart in my mid-20s. Over the course of a few weeks, I went from being a "healthy" young adult to spending the bulk of my time in the hospital and with doctors due to the sudden onset of some mysterious condition.

Essentially, my body began to eat itself from the inside out. This is not an exaggeration. I was bleeding internally and none of my doctors could give me a solid reason why. I was so weak and tired I couldn't even stand up long enough to brush my teeth, let alone go to work. My life stopped.

2005 was the year my to-do list included seven emergency room visits, three week-long stays in the hospital (including one two-day stint in the cardiac ward), two emergency transfusions, four kidney stones, eight UTIs, two kidney infections, four CT scans, one MRI, one lithotripsy procedure, one liver biopsy (to match a corresponding liver tumor – yay!), and one episode where I collapsed on the job in front of all my coworkers. And that crazy list is only the half of it!

The eventual diagnosis was Ulcerative Colitis, but my doctors couldn't tell me why my entire body was failing all at once. Every doctor I talked to told me that I'd be spending the rest of my life on hardcore can-



Hi. I'm Steph.

cer-causing medications, lest I slowly bleed to death.

After spending 18 months on heavy steroids – which further kicked my ass, with the added bonus of making me a crazy bitch – I'd had enough. I knew in my heart that medication wasn't the answer. I needed to change my life.



## INSTEAD OF DYING, I CHANGED THE WAY I ATE

I'm not talking crunchy-hippie lifestyle change, because that's just not how I roll. Sure, I started drinking green juices and eating quinoa, but I still eat the same foods everyone else does. I just learned to eat smarter and fresher.

But in order to do that, I had to learn how to cook. Fail! I hadn't cooked anything besides a jar of Ragu in my entire adult life!

It took some time and hard work, and now I'm 100% back to my old self. I wake up rested, I have energy throughout the day, and I sleep soundly at night. Plus, I'm a force to be reckoned with in the kitchen. RAWR.

Now I eat like royalty, or rather like healthy royalty. I still eat carbs, meat, pie, and bacon. The difference

is that I make it all myself, so I know exactly what goes into my body.

Since getting better, my goal is to help you get back to real eating, to improve your relationship with food, and to make cooking a pleasure.

It's not just about healthy eating - it's about living a joyful life. And I believe that starts in the kitchen.

## WHO I'M NOT

I'm not a doctor, dietician, nutritionist, or any sort of healthcare provider. I 100% percent honor any way you choose to maintain your body, and I may make suggestions, but I have no background in medicine or healthcare, clinical or otherwise. I'm just someone who's been sick and then found another, less intense way to come back from the brink of illness, and I found my way out of the fog to a place of unbelievable sunlight and happiness. I know my way around the

kitchen and I'm happy to be your culinary guide and cheerleader.

## 100% JUDGMENT FREE!

I stay out of judgment, I'm not dogmatic, and I don't believe that any one way of eating applies to everyone. I've lived all across the culinary map. You're unique, and so are your dietary needs.

Does it makes you feel great to avoid gluten? Do you feel that you need to eat meat three to five times a week to keep your energy up and your hair from falling out? Are you salad averse while being super carb-passionate? Is a meal just not complete without something sweet to finish it off?

I'm not here to judge. I'm here to help you eat what you love, while being the best YOU possible.



# THE PURPOSE OF HAPPY FOODS

My wish – and the goal of this ebook – is that you experience two things.

First, food must make you feel good on a physical level. It's pretty simple: you should feel good when you finish a meal. If you feel tired, bloated, crampy, cranky, sleepy, or foggy, something's not right. Your digestion should flow like you've hit the play button on your remote, not like you're jamming your thumb into the pause, fast-forward, or (yikes) rewind buttons.

*“No more hiding a stack of Lean Cuisines in the back of the freezer...”*

Some folks get to the point where they're so used to these bummers feeling that they don't notice them anymore. “Come on, this is how everyone feels. It's totally normal, right? This is just what happens as we

get older.” Sure, until you start cleaning up the way you eat. The before-and-after contrast can be so monumentally different that it's life-changing.

Second, I want you to feel proud of what you eat. Not in a boastful way; rather, what I want for you is to not feel guilt, shame, or embarrassment about what you put in your body. My goal for you, my dear, is to feel elated about the food you're eating, to glow with sense of happiness and satisfaction every time you step into the kitchen to cook.

No more hiding a stack of Lean Cuisines in the back of the freezer, or reflexively making excuses whenever a friend peeks into your fridge looking for a snack. No more scrambling for junk food when you're reaching Chernobyl levels of hangry, no more scanning past luscious recipes because you think, “Oh god, there's no way I could make that.” There's a better way to eat, and there's a better way to live.



*Can food really make you happier? Yes, yes it can.*



# OATS: FIBER = A HAPPY GUT

For ages, doctors have been hounding their patients to eat more fiber. Besides reducing the risk of diabetes, colon cancer, and coronary heart disease, fiber helps our digestion move along swiftly and smoothly. And as you're likely aware, good digestion definitely influences our overall mood in a positive way (in contrast to bad digestion making us cranky). As it turns out, fiber plays an even more profound role in our overall sense of wellbeing, to the degree that scientists are calling the gut our "second brain," with fiber intake being an important factor in our day-to-day mood balance.

What does the gut have to do with your mood?

Research has discovered that the lower digestive tract contains an enormous amount of neural tissue. More than your spinal cord, and second only to the brain. In fact, the gut can go about a lot of its business without consulting the brain and often sends information one way, up to the brain itself, without needing any feedback in return. That's a tall order for an organ we originally thought did nothing but break down food and absorb water.

While the gut is not known to be capable of thought, scientists believe this bundle of neural pathways likely has a huge influence over our emotions. In fact, the gut contains 95% of our body's serotonin, the neurotransmitter responsible for mood, learning, and sleep, among other things. The gut plays such a big part in our emotional health that researchers are testing depression treatments that involve stimulating the nerves in our digestive system.

Tests show that a low-fiber diet can cause digestive stagnation, resulting in all sorts of no-bueno rot and fermentation "down there." When the stuff in our colon goes sour but still has another few hours before it exits the body – or days, depending on your digestion – the gut sends distress signals to the brain, which scientists say can have a huge effect on our mental and emotional health.

That's where the magical digestive unicorn fiber comes in. Among other things, it acts as a scrub brush, pushing digested food through your system before it has the chance to turn into [literally] toxic waste. Fiber also regulates the rate at which sugar is absorbed into your blood stream, which helps out your pancreas. A smooth-sailing digestive track + mellow insulin response = the foundation for physical and emotional balance. Yay!

*"What does the gut have to do with your mood?"*

Getting more fiber in your diet is super important for your everyday wellbeing, and I get so many questions from people asking how they can eat more without feeling like they're noshing on rabbit food three meals a day. And, you know, Metamucil is most definitely **not** good eats. Right? Right.

(For what it's worth, rabbits eat pretty damn well. Have you ever heard of a rabbit with colon diabetes or colon cancer?)

The decadent baked oatmeal dish below is not only insanely delicious, it's full of oats which carry with them millions of little scrubbing buddies to help clear out your gut, lower your risk of certain bummer diseases, improve your overall energy levels, and keep your gut pumping happy hormones up to your brain. A power-pack of mixed berries add a huge helping of antioxidants, which act like little fairy godmothers to help prevent cellular damage caused by oxidation and aging. And instead of using refined sugar I recommend maple syrup, which I prefer since it is relatively unprocessed (assuming you're using 100% pure maple syrup).



# BAKED OATMEAL WITH PECANS, COCONUT, AND BERRIES

**SERVES: 4-6 / PREP TIME: 5 MINS / COOK TIME: 30 MINS / TOTAL TIME: 35 MINS**

This breakfast is so satisfying you'll swear it's bad for you, but really, it's a big old helping of hearty whole-grain lovin'. You'll have a hard time finding a more perfect combination of delicious and healthy. You're welcome! See page 22 for nutritional information.

## INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons butter	1 large egg
2 cups rolled oats	1/3 cup maple syrup
1 teaspoon baking powder	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon	2 cups milk - cow, soy, almond, whichever you like
1 teaspoon ground ginger	Plain yogurt or crème fraîche
1/2 teaspoon salt	Sea salt
1/3 cup coarsely chopped pecans	Freshly ground black pepper
1/3 cup thick-shredded coconut	Olive oil
1/2 cups mixed berries, fresh or frozen	

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F/190°C. Place the oven rack in the top third of the oven. Set butter in a deep casserole dish or 8-inch square baking dish and set the dish in the oven. Allow to heat for about 5 minutes, or until the butter is melted. Remove the dish from the oven.
2. While the butter is melting, mix together the oats, baking powder, cinnamon, ginger, and salt. Pour into the baking dish with the melted butter, and toss the oats until they are coated evenly with butter. Stir in pecans and coconut, mixing well, then toss in berries. Make sure berries are evenly scattered around the dish.
3. Whisk together the egg, maple syrup, and vanilla. Add milk and mix well. Pour the milk evenly over the oats. Bake for 35-45 minutes, or until the top turns gently golden and the edges are bubbling. Allow to cool 10 minutes before serving. Top with fresh yogurt or crème fraîche.



## NOTES

If your favorite fresh berries aren't in season, use frozen. When picked for commercial freezing, fruit is often left to ripen on the vine much longer than produce that is intended for the fresh bins at the grocery store. Since these berries are allowed to ripen in the sun, their health-supporting nutrients can be even more potent than those you buy fresh. Who knew?



# BLUEBERRIES: NATURE'S LITTLE ZOMBIE HUNTERS

Aging is a reality of life. We all age differently, but there are some signs few of us escape without: crow's feet, gray hair, fatigue, less-than-nimble joints, changes in metabolism. The list goes on and on... and on.

*"In the end what you're left with is a virtual zombie apocalypse... in your body."*

One part of aging no one gets to skip is cellular damage due to oxidation. Just like a slice of apple turns brown when left on the counter, our bodies break down as we metabolize oxygen. Oxidation is a normal part of aging and everyday metabolism, but when you add to this the sinister cell destroyers we're exposed to every day (such as air pollution, pesticides, and fire retardants in household items) or the toxins we knowingly pipe into our bodies for various reasons (prescription drugs, alcohol, and cigarette smoke) cellular damage becomes a very clear and present danger.

All this icky stuff floating around our bodies results in a legion of free-radicals, or damaged cells that are missing a crucial component of their molecular makeup. These zombie-cells cruise around creating more zombies, ravaging other cells in an attempt to reclaim their missing molecules. This second generation of sad cells are in turn left with damaged DNA, and when they reproduce, they go on to create future generations of mutant cells - which then in turn go on to reproduce their own new branches of the zombie

family tree. It's a downhill domino effect of biological drama.



*Meet Mother Nature's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"*

In the end what you're left with is a virtual zombie apocalypse... in your body. [Insert Walking Dead reference here.] And not unlike horror movies where

the undead multiply faster than you can fight them off, mutant cells reproduce much faster than healthy cells, starting a chain reaction that speeds up the longer it's allowed to progress. The result is diseased tissue that can turn into masses of seriously life altering sadness. Can you see where I'm going with this?

Besides the potential for cancer and organ damage, unchecked cellular breakdown causes fatigue, depression, metabolic problems, and other generally bummed symptoms as your bodily functions begin to fail. You feel less energetic. You age faster. You look older. Disease happens. Your body begins to act out it's own internal version of the 28 Days Later.

Thankfully, cellular damage is also reversible to some degree. Hallelujah! Enter the hero: Antioxidants.

Depending on their specific chemical makeup, some antioxidants have the ability to prevent free-radical damage from occurring, while others stop mutant cell reproduction once it's already begun. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes contain complex mixes of antioxidants that work together to support all the different tissues in your body. This is a primary reason it's so important to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, making sure to eat from every color of the rainbow; the synergistic effects of combined antioxidants from a variety of produce will give you the best protection against cellular breakdown, organ damage, cancer, and all the other nasties that seem to become household names as we get older.

This simple smoothie is packed with nutrients, making it a great snack between breakfast and lunch. Blueberries are high in antioxidants and low on the glycemic scale, meaning they won't make your blood sugar spike like you've just eaten a Snickers bar. Fresh green mint is also full of antioxidants, with the added bonus of energizing compounds that will perk you up and keep you on your game. (In fact, see the mint section in this very book!) A little lemon makes for a brighter disposition, and plain yogurt provides happy little probiotics to keep your gut primed and ready to go. And did I mention it's delicious? Because this smoothie is so good I could honestly live on it. Truth.

If fresh berries aren't in season, feel free to use frozen. As I mentioned back in the oats section, fruit that is grown for commercial freezing is left to ripen on the vine much longer than standard produce — this means frozen fruit is often more rich in nutrients than the stuff you buy fresh at your local large-scale grocery store. And it lasts a hell of a lot longer!



# BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIES WITH MINT AND LEMON

**SERVES: 2 / PREP TIME: 15 MINS / COOK TIME: 0 MINS / TOTAL TIME: 15 MINS**

This simple smoothie is packed with nutrients, making it a great snack between breakfast and lunch. A little lemon makes for a brighter disposition, and plain yogurt provides happy little probiotics to keep your gut primed and ready to go. And did I mention it's delicious? Because this smoothie is so good I could honestly live on it. See page 23 for nutritional information.

## INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup fresh mint leaves  
1 tablespoon lemon zest  
1 1/2 cup yogurt  
1/2 cup milk  
2 cup frozen blueberries  
2 handfuls of ice cubes  
1/4 cup honey or agave nectar (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In the jar of your blender, combine mint, lemon zest, yogurt, and milk. Cover and allow to sit for 15 minutes, if you've got time. This will allow the mint and lemon flavor to permeate the fat in the dairy, creating a more robust flavor.
2. Add the blueberries, ice cubes, and honey or agave nectar (if using). Blend until smooth. Drink immediately!

## NOTES

Fat is a flavor carrier, so if you've got time to let the aromats (mint and lemon, in this case) sit in the yogurt for a few minutes, you'll notice their flavors become stronger than if you'd just thrown them into the blender and blitzed right away.

If you have crushed ice on hand, that will make the blending process a lot faster.

If fresh berries aren't available, use frozen.



# YOGURT: YOUR PROBIOTIC BFF

I don't know about you, but few things make me sadder than tummy troubles. When my digestive system is all screwed up, everything in life seems so much harder.

You know what I mean, right? One day you're fine, and then out of the blue things start going haywire. Your digestive tract starts acting like someone sat on the TV remote while you're watching a movie. Sometimes it starts running in fast forward, or maybe the pause button is getting a major workout. Or, god forbid, everything starts moving in reverse. UGH.

*"There are many great sources of probiotics, but the easiest is probably sitting in your refrigerator right now..."*

When it comes to everyday health problems, we ladies often say that stomach issues are the biggest, most uncomfortable detractor from our overall sense of wellbeing. That's because nausea, diarrhea, and constipation (or some unfortunately combo of the three) can cause life to simply *stop*. It's really hard to go to work when you can't move more than 20 feet from your bathroom. When it comes to pursuing your dreams, it can be super distracting to be stuck on the couch with a waffling sense that you're going to barf. And truly, you probably can't pour all of your energy into something (or someone!) you love when it feels like there's a boulder lodged in your abdomen and it hasn't moved in three days.

Our gastrointestinal tracts are full of happy little bacteria – also known as our intestinal flora – and these critters play a huge role in our overall digestive health (and, as studies are finding, the health of many other organs as well). Sadly, despite performing the very important service of keeping our digestion moving along properly, we unwittingly bump off our armies of flora by way of stress, antibiotics, and poor diet. In order to regain balance, we need to replenish that good bacteria.

That's where probiotics come in.

There are many great sources of probiotics, but the easiest is probably sitting in your refrigerator right now: plain yogurt. Yup, I mean regular old white yogurt, not the processed pink, blue, or yellow yogurts that come in little cups. That stuff may have been cultured at the factory where it was produced, but all the junk they add (namely the extra sugar, colorings, flavorings, and preservatives) damage our little bacterial friends, doing WAY more harm than good.

Sidenote: If you like the fruity stuff, it's actually better for you (and *way* cheaper) to buy plain yogurt and add your own fresh fruit and honey. And it tastes a lot better! You can even mix it up a few days ahead of



*Yogurt contains about 5 billion of your closest friends.*

time and pretend you're diving face-first into a cup of sugary Yoplait. Not that I've ever thought about doing that.

Plain yogurt is an incredibly versatile food. It's happy in both sweet and savory dishes, it can be eaten either as a meal or as a snack, and it complements



pretty much any ingredient you stir into it. You can use it as cream for your berries, a topping on your stew, a dollop dropped onto a fillet of steamed fish, or nosh on it all by it's lonesome. Personally, my favorite way to enjoy plain yogurt is as a dip with veggies, which you'll see below.

If you're vegan or have a lactose intolerance problem, cultured soy yogurt and cultured coconut milk work just as well as a source of probiotics. Just make sure to get brands that contain very little added sugar,

preservatives, and congealing agents such as xanthan gum, guar gum, lecithin, or carageenan. While the food lobby argues that these thickeners are totally safe, studies have shows they can cause long-term digestive upset... which is the exact problem we're trying to resolve here, right?

This Persian spiced veggie dip makes a lovely, healthy snack for those days when you're home alone and needing something to fend off a hangry attack. It's also just as comfortable all dressed up for a big party,

served in a pretty bowl alongside a big platter of fresh vegetables or table crackers. Cumin, turmeric, and sauteed garlic bring a pop of warm flavor to the table, while dried mint and ground pistachios add their own grounding influence. You may just find yourself nibbling at this delicious dip all day long, or you could stir it into some baby spinach, top it with leftover shredded chicken, and call it dinner.

## WHAT TO DO?

While there are myriad reasons why your digestive system can go wonky, the first step in getting everything back to normal is to sit down and get real with yourself. It's time to reflect on some personal questions.

First, what's going on in your life?

Stress is a HUGE factor when it comes to digestive health. Are you super stressed out? Burnt out? Bummed out? All of these can affect your digestion. Your first line of defense might be a little self-TLC by way of a massage, a picnic in the park, or a few days out at the coast.

Second, what are you eating? Or not eating?

It's pretty obvious that the food we eat affects our digestion. It's like, "Thank you, Captain Obvious." But surprisingly, women tend to look everywhere but their own diets when it comes to fixing tummy problems. We reach for antacids, over-the-counter pills, and prescription medications. Sure these can be very effective, but sometimes food can be a very effective medicine, too. Like foods high in probiotics.

I should note here: I'm not a physician, and I am certainly not discouraging you from paying a visit to your doctor if you have digestive troubles. Sometimes issues with your gut are signs of a much larger problem and should most definitely get them looked at. But if you feel like that's not the option for you right now, food might be a good solution. Look into fermented goodies such as kim chi, sauerkraut, and fresh miso to boost your probiotic intake.

# PERSIAN SPICED VEGGIE DIP

**SERVES:** 2 to 4 / **PREP TIME:** 10 mins / **COOK TIME:** 5 mins / **TOTAL TIME:** 15 mins

This spiced veggie dip makes a lovely, healthy snack when you're needing something to fend off a hangry attack. Cumin, turmeric, and sauteed garlic bring a pop of warm flavor to the table, while dried mint and ground pistachios add their own grounding influence. See page 24 for nutritional information.

## INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons olive oil	1/4 teaspoon freshly-ground black pepper
1 medium-sized clove of garlic, peeled and diced	3 tablespoons finely chopped pistachios
2 cups plain yogurt - feel free to use cow, goat, soy, or Greek yogurt	2 tablespoons dried mint, crumbled
1/2 teaspoon yellow curry powder	More olive oil for drizzling
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin	2 teaspoons red pepper flakes (optional)
1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric (optional)	1 pound raw veggies of your choice, such as carrots, celery, broccoli, or snap peas.
1/4 teaspoon salt	

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a small frying pan, heat olive oil over medium-low heat. Add garlic to the cooking oil. Cook the garlic for 2 minutes, stirring every 30 seconds or so, just until it starts to brown. (Don't let it get more than a little brown, or it will begin to burn very quickly!) Remove from heat and allow to cool for 5 minutes.
2. Pour the yogurt into a bowl and add the curry powder, cumin, turmeric, salt, and pepper. Mix well. Add the garlic and its all of its oil. Stir well. Taste the dip and add more salt and pepper to taste. At this point you can cover the dip and store in the refrigerator until you're ready to serve it.
3. Pour the yogurt into a bowl and sprinkle the top with chopped pistachios, dried mint, and a small drizzle of olive oil. To spice it up a little more, sprinkle the top with red pepper flakes or a few good turns of coarsely cracked black pepper. Serve with fresh vegetables.

## NOTES

If you don't want to turn on the stove, you can also add the garlic to the dip raw - though I really love the smokier, mellower flavor of the cooked garlic infused into the olive oil.

Another use for this dip: Use it as a dressing for a salad of baby spinach, topped with leftover chicken or a sliced hard-boiled egg. Voila! Instant healthy, thrifty dinner or super portable lunch.





# MINT: MORE THAN FRESH BREATH

Can you think of a single scent or flavor more energizing than mint? It just screams, HELLO BABY! Besides the fact that it smells and tastes great, mint is also a potent green full of phytochemicals and antioxidants, packed with giddy little compounds that can bring about some epic goodness when it comes to your health.

Mint has been used since ancient times to soothe everyday indigestion, but studies have recently found that it can have profound effects on your digestive track, specifically for problems like irritable bowel syndrome. By increasing bile production and relaxing the muscles that line the stomach, mint is a great solution for getting rid of tummy demons like nausea, bloating, stomach cramps, abdominal pain, and sour stomach. A small amount taken after eating, steeped in a tea or by munching on fresh leaves, can really improve your digestion. And as a side effect it cures a mean case of after dinner dragon-breath!

On top of all this digestive love, mint is packed with cancer-fighting antioxidants and antibacterial compounds. Scientists have found that mint may help reduce the risk of liver cancer, which is always a good thing, right? And if you're nose-deep in cold-and-flu season, mint is a great herb for warding off opportunistic bacterial infections that love to pounce as soon as your immune system is busy fighting off this month's virus du jour.

While the medicinal properties of mint are definitely something to sing from the rooftops, what I'm really interested in sharing with you is how it can be used to improve your overall sense of clarity and wellbeing.

For ages, mint has been used in aromatherapy as an energizer and to clear the mind, and you've likely smelled it in soaps, shampoos, and lotions meant to boost your energy and clear your head. Using a mint-infused body wash during your morning shower can enliven your spirit and give you a much-needed AM kick in the butt.

How does mint help perk you up when you're dragging your ass around like a sack of bricks? Well, you've smelled Vicks Vapo-Rub, right? That stuff that you put under your nose when you've got congestion? Yup, that's all menthol. Raw mint - and mint tea as well - helps to open airways, which in turn increases oxygen in the blood. This boost in O2 can fire you up when you're tired, fatigued, or just generally feeling the ick.

The menthol properties in mint can also increase mental clarity - so if you've got to stay on your game for an afternoon, keep a bunch of mint nearby. Just rub the bunch gently with your hands and inhale deeply. Voila! Instant zing! A little vial of mint essential oil kept in your desk can also be a useful pick-me-up in the middle of a particularly sleepy afternoon.

I've crafted a simple dinner recipe that is light and refreshing, with a big old kiss of mint to boot you out of any evening fatigue you may find yourself in. This bright pasta salad contains fresh mint for energy, lemon for a sunny disposition, green peas for a shot of chlorophyll and happy antioxidants, and cheese for a generous helping of protein. If you'd like to lighten this dish up a little more, feel



*Fresh mint provides a nearly instant pick-me-up.*

free to leave out the cheese and substitute chopped almonds or chickpeas.

Healthy dinner leftovers make it a lot easier to avoid junk food the following day, so I recommend making a huge bowl of this salad for dinner one night and then digging in every day for lunch until it's gone. Easy, healthy lunches for the win!

# MINTY PASTA SALAD WITH LEMON, CHEESE, AND BABY PEAS

**SERVES:** 2 - 4 / **PREP TIME:** 10 mins / **COOK TIME:** 10 mins / **TOTAL TIME:** 20 mins

A simple dinner recipe that is light and refreshing, with a big old kiss of mint to boot you out of any evening fatigue you may find yourself in. This bright pasta salad contains fresh mint for energy, lemon for a sunny disposition, green peas for a shot of chlorophyll and happy antioxidants, and cheese for a generous helping of protein. See page 25 for nutritional information.

## INGREDIENTS

10 ounces spiral pasta

1/2 pound Gouda cheese, rind removed, cut into 1-inch cubes

3 tablespoons lemon juice

1 cup frozen peas, defrosted

4 tablespoons fresh mint leaves, cut into chiffonade

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Zest of 1 medium lemon

Freshly ground black pepper

Sea salt

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cook the pasta in salted boiling water until al dente. Drain through a colander and rinse with cold water to cool. Shake well to drain the excess water.
2. Toss all the ingredients together in a bowl, mixing well and making sure to not mash the pasta. Taste the salad. Does it need more lemon juice? Then add a little more, 1 teaspoon at a time. Mint? Toss in another handful. How about salt or pepper? Then sprinkle in a bit more and taste it again. When the dish is balanced to your satisfaction, serve and marvel at how little time it took to put together.



## NOTES

If you'd like to lighten this dish up a little more, feel free to leave out the cheese and substitute chopped almonds or chickpeas.

Healthy dinner leftovers make it a lot easier to avoid junk food the following day, so I recommend making a huge bowl of this salad for dinner one night and then digging in every day for lunch until it's gone. Easy lunches for the win!



# CHOCOLATE: ROMANCING THE NEUROTRANSMITTER

I likely don't have to tell you twice that chocolate can make you happy. Any chocolate lover knows that a bite or two can put a smile on your face, regardless of the science involved. The thing is, there ARE actual scientific reasons why chocolate tickles your happy sensors, and studies are beginning to show the compounds in cocoa can also improve your health.

First off, let's talk about the effects of chocolate on the brain. Besides a tiny bump of caffeine, which



*Chocolate is a girl's best friend.*

increases heart rate and boosts brain activity, chocolate also contains compounds that trigger the release of neurotransmitters. One example is how eating chocolate increases the levels of endorphins released into the brain, and these brain chemicals work to lessen pain and decrease stress. Chocolate also gives us a nice little bump of serotonin, a chemical in our brain that helps regulate mood, sleep, appetite, memory, and learning. Many prescription antidepressants are designed to keep serotonin more active in our brains, and a slight increase in serotonin has been shown to help relieve depression, anxiety, and insomnia.

*"...Other goodies in chocolate are known to encourage relaxation, a sense of wellbeing, and in some cases, a mild feeling of euphoria that mimics the feeling of falling in love..."*

Recent studies also show that additional compounds in chocolate can improve blood pressure, insulin sensitivity, and cardiovascular health, while antioxidants present in chocolate can reduce inflammation and stop cancer cells from multiplying. As if you needed more reasons to get excited, other goodies in chocolate are known to encourage relaxation, a sense of wellbeing, and in some cases, a mild euphoria that mimics the feeling of falling in love – which is likely the reason ancient Aztecs used it for its aphrodisiac properties. Can I get a hell yes?!

Yay! Isn't this great news? We can go nuts and eat as much chocolate as we want, right?

Nope. I wish.

There's always a 'but,' right? It's important to remember that not all chocolate is created equal. Most studies on chocolate refer to straight cocoa, isolated cocoa compounds, or dark chocolate that has been minimally processed. The reason for this is simple: overly processed cocoa loses many of its nutrients during manufacturing, which leaves it devoid of the amino acids, antioxidants, and fiber that do the most good in our bodies. So if you find cocoa that says it's been *Dutch processed* or processed with alkali, what you're holding may taste great, but it won't do your body a whole lot of good.

Also! Milk chocolate, or any chocolate with lots of added sugar and fat, is still the opposite of healthy. So that means brownies, Milky Way bars, chocolate cake, chocolate chips, and chocolate ice cream are still on the *don't go overboard* list. So I implore you, Sweet Pea, don't go binging on sweet treats while telling yourself that you're doing your body a favor, because that's just not the way it works. It only takes 8 to 20 grams of high-quality, modestly-processed dark chocolate to get the benefits – which is about one or two small squares of 60-70% cocoa. Face-planting into a chocolate silk pie will do far more harm than good. Sigh.

Since the decadent milk chocolate we know and love isn't all that good for us, what's a cocoa-loving girl to do with all this knowledge? What if I said I knew a rich, satisfying, right-proper chocolate treat that gives you all the health benefits of cocoa without the icky junk that comes with most desserts?

Get ready to celebrate.

This chocolate mousse is literally made with two ingredients: dark chocolate and water. Through the magic of emulsification, they whip up into a lusciously smooth, silky texture that glides across your tongue, leaving both your tastebuds and your brain singing *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah*. It's a simple recipe that keeps well in the fridge for up to five days. We can thank French chemist and gastronome Hervé This for his discovery of this dish.

## WHICH CHOCOLATE?

Remember, you'll need to find a brand of chocolate that is *not* processed with alkali if you want the maximum health benefits of the antioxidants in chocolate. As of this printing, the following brands do not use Dutch/alkali processing for their chocolate (but things change, so always check your labels):

Tcho Chocolate (my favorite!)

Endangered Species Chocolate

Equal Exchange Chocolate

Green & Black's Chocolate

Alter Ego Chocolate

Divine Chocolate

Theo Chocolate



# MAGICAL TWO-INGREDIENT CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

**SERVES: 4 / PREP TIME: 15 MINS / COOK TIME: 5 MINS / TOTAL TIME: 20 MINS**

This chocolate mousse is literally made with two ingredients: dark chocolate and water (with optional whipped cream, if you like). Through the magic of emulsification, they whip up into a lusciously smooth, silky texture. It's a simple recipe that keeps in the fridge for up to 5 days. See page 26 for nutritional information.

## INGREDIENTS

Ice cubes  
3/4 cup water  
8 ounces dark chocolate, chopped  
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill a large bowl halfway full with ice cubes. Find a small pot that will fit in the bowl with its bottom nestled into the ice cubes.
2. Add water to the small saucepan and heat over medium-low heat. As the water starts to steam, whisk in the chopped chocolate until you've got a smooth sauce. Set the pot in the bowl of ice cubes, gently pushing the bottom of the pot down into the ice. Whisk the chocolate sauce with a balloon whisk until it thickens and takes on a mousse-like texture. Set aside.
3. Pour whipping cream into a separate bowl and beat until you've got soft peaks. Set aside 1/2 cup of the whipped cream for topping the mousse. Stir the rest of the whipped cream into the mousse until you've got a smooth texture. Serve topped with a dollop of whipped cream.



## NOTES

The whipped cream is optional here, though it will lighten up the mousse considerably. If enjoyed without the whipped cream, this mousse is a thick, dark chocolate dream that will fill you up in four or five bites. Either way, it's perfection!

See the sidebar on page 19 for what kinds of chocolate still have their antioxidant content in tact after being processed.

# FOOD DRAMA? LET'S END IT HERE.

Step away from the frozen dinners! Stop dialing the number for takeout!

It's time for a real food revolution: To shift from fearful to fearless, from "bad cook" to badass. To finally tame & reclaim the kitchen as your happy place.

[FearlessFresh.com](http://FearlessFresh.com) is a new project I'm launching in early 2015. Equal parts online cooking school and personalized culinary coaching, I'm designing Fearless Fresh to be your go-to spot for all things easy and delicious.

## DOES THIS SCENARIO SOUND FAMILIAR?

It's 6pm on a Wednesday night. You just got home from a crazy busy day, and you're starving.

All you want to do is chill out on the couch with Netflix and a glass of wine. Those Trader Joe's enchiladas in the freezer keep calling to you, but you know they're not good for you -- and they won't help get rid of that "winter weight" that seems to have extended its stay through summer vacation.

You pull out the package and glance at the ingredients list. You notice all that

added salt, sugar, fat... and what the hell are carrageenan and sodium phosphate, anyways? But hey, at least the box says "organic," right?

You know there's a better way to eat and a better way to feel, but how are you supposed to muster the energy to make something healthy AND delicious? You're exhausted. You deserve some pampering, and you'd give anything for a personal chef right about now.



Dinnertime fail! Let's end it here.

I'm here to guide you on your path to becoming a cooking ninja. Together, we'll work to get you comfortable in the kitchen, master some simple recipes and techniques, and then move on to the kinds of dishes you'd thought you'd never be able to make.





# NUTRITIONAL INFO: BAKED OATMEAL

## Morning Baked Oatmeal with Berries and Coconut - TCL

Calories (kcal):	475
% Calories from Fat:	42.2%
% Calories from Carbohydrates:	46.8%
% Calories from Protein:	11.0%

### Per Serving Nutritional Information

Total Fat (g):	23g	35%	Vitamin B6 (mg):	.1mg	7%
Saturated Fat (g):	9g	47%	Vitamin B12 (mcg):	.6mcg	10%
Monounsaturated Fat (g):	8g	38%	Thiamin B1 (mg):	.5mg	31%
Polyunsaturated Fat (g):	3g	14%	Riboflavin B2 (mg):	.3mg	20%
Cholesterol (mg):	85mg	28%	Folacin (mcg):	35mcg	9%
Total Carbohydrate (g):	57g	19%	Niacin (mg):	1mg	3%
Dietary Fiber (g):	7g	27%	Caffeine (mg):	0mg	N/A
Protein (g):	13g	27%	Alcohol (kcal):	6	N/A
Sodium (mg):	530mg	22%	% Refuse:		
Potassium (mg):	504mg	14%	<b>Food Exchanges</b>		
Calcium (mg):	293mg	29%	Grain (Starch):		2
Iron (mg):	3mg	19%	Lean Meat:		0
Zinc (mg):	3mg	17%	Vegetable:		0
Vitamin C (mg):	12mg	21%	Fruit:		0
Vitamin A (i.u.):	494IU	10%	Non-Fat Milk:		1/2
Vitamin A (r.e.):	124RE	12%	Fat:		4
			Other Carbohvdrates:		1

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.

# NUTRITIONAL INFO: BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIES

## Blueberry Smoothies with Mint and Lemon

Calories (kcal):	353
% Calories from Fat:	19.6%
% Calories from Carbohydrates:	70.2%
% Calories from Protein:	10.2%

### Per Serving Nutritional Information

Total Fat (g):	8g	13%	Vitamin B6 (mg):	.2mg	9%
Saturated Fat (g):	4g	20%	Vitamin B12 (mcg):	.7mcg	11%
Monounsaturated Fat (g):	2g	9%	Thiamin B1 (mg):	.2mg	13%
Polyunsaturated Fat (g):	1g	6%	Riboflavin B2 (mg):	.4mg	21%
Cholesterol (mg):	23mg	8%	Folacin (mcg):	50mcg	12%
Total Carbohydrate (g):	66g	22%	Niacin (mg):	1mg	5%
Dietary Fiber (g):	7g	27%	Caffeine (mg):	0mg	N/A
Protein (g):	10g	19%	Alcohol (kcal):	0	N/A
Sodium (mg):	103mg	4%	% Refuse:		
Potassium (mg):	585mg	17%	Food Exchanges		
Calcium (mg):	289mg	29%	Grain (Starch):		0
Iron (mg):	3mg	19%	Lean Meat:		0
Zinc (mg):	2mg	11%	Vegetable:		0
Vitamin C (mg):	12mg	20%	Fruit:		1 1/2
Vitamin A (i.u.):	1291IU	26%	Non-Fat Milk:		1/2
Vitamin A (r.e.):	174RE	17%	Fat:		1
			Other Carbohvdrates:		3

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.

# NUTRITIONAL INFO: PERSIAN VEGGIE DIP

## Persian Spiced Veggie Dip

Calories (kcal):	206
% Calories from Fat:	73.2%
% Calories from Carbohydrates:	15.8%
% Calories from Protein:	11.0%

## Per Serving Nutritional Information

Total Fat (g):	17g	27%
Saturated Fat (g):	4g	22%
Monounsaturated Fat (g):	11g	48%
Polyunsaturated Fat (g):	1g	7%
Cholesterol (mg):	16mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate (g):	8g	3%
Dietary Fiber (g):	1g	4%
Protein (g):	6g	12%
Sodium (mg):	194mg	8%
Potassium (mg):	291mg	8%
Calcium (mg):	175mg	17%
Iron (mg):	2mg	9%
Zinc (mg):	1mg	6%
Vitamin C (mg):	3mg	4%
Vitamin A (i.u.):	307IU	6%
Vitamin A (r.e.):	61RE	6%

Vitamin B6 (mg):	.1mg	4%
Vitamin B12 (mcg):	.5mcg	8%
Thiamin B1 (mg):	.1mg	6%
Riboflavin B2 (mg):	.2mg	11%
Folacin (mcg):	18mcg	4%
Niacin (mg):	trace	1%
Caffeine (mg):	0mg	N/A
Alcohol (kcal):	0	N/A
% Refuse:		

## Food Exchanges

Grain (Starch):	0
Lean Meat:	0
Vegetable:	0
Fruit:	0
Non-Fat Milk:	1/2
Fat:	3 1/2
Other Carbohydrates:	1/2

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.



# NUTRITIONAL INFO: MINTY PASTA SALAD

## Minty Pasta Salad with Lemon, Cheese, and Baby Peas

Calories (kcal):	591
% Calories from Fat:	40.9%
% Calories from Carbohydrates:	41.9%
% Calories from Protein:	17.2%

### Per Serving Nutritional Information

Total Fat (g):	27g	42%	Vitamin B6 (mg):	.2mg	9%
Saturated Fat (g):	12g	58%	Vitamin B12 (mcg):	.9mcg	14%
Monounsaturated Fat (g):	12g	54%	Thiamin B1 (mg):	.8mg	56%
Polyunsaturated Fat (g):	2g	8%	Riboflavin B2 (mg):	.5mg	32%
Cholesterol (mg):	65mg	22%	Folacin (mcg):	53mcg	13%
Total Carbohydrate (g):	62g	21%	Niacin (mg):	6mg	30%
Dietary Fiber (g):	4g	16%	Caffeine (mg):	0mg	N/A
Protein (g):	25g	51%	Alcohol (kcal):	0	N/A
Sodium (mg):	512mg	21%	% Refuse:		
Potassium (mg):	298mg	9%	Food Exchanges		
Calcium (mg):	434mg	43%	Grain (Starch):		4
Iron (mg):	4mg	23%	Lean Meat:		2
Zinc (mg):	3mg	23%	Vegetable:		0
Vitamin C (mg):	20mg	34%	Fruit:		0
Vitamin A (i.u.):	863IU	17%	Non-Fat Milk:		0
Vitamin A (r.e.):	148 1/2RE	15%	Fat:		4
			Other Carbohvdrates:		0

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.

# NUTRITIONAL INFO: CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

## Magical Two-Ingredient Chocolate Mousse

Calories (kcal):	372
% Calories from Fat:	61.9%
% Calories from Carbohydrates:	34.9%
% Calories from Protein:	3.2%

### Per Serving Nutritional Information

Total Fat (g):	28g	43%
Saturated Fat (g):	7g	34%
Monounsaturated Fat (g):	3g	14%
Polyunsaturated Fat (g):	trace	2%
Cholesterol (mg):	41mg	14%
Total Carbohydrate (g):	36g	12%
Dietary Fiber (g):	3g	12%
Protein (g):	3g	7%
Sodium (mg):	18mg	1%
Potassium (mg):	215mg	6%
Calcium (mg):	31mg	3%
Iron (mg):	1mg	7%
Zinc (mg):	1mg	6%
Vitamin C (mg):	trace	0%
Vitamin A (i.u.):	449IU	9%
Vitamin A (r.e.):	127 1/2RE	13%

Vitamin B6 (mg):	trace	2%
Vitamin B12 (mcg):	.1mcg	1%
Thiamin B1 (mg):	trace	1%
Riboflavin B2 (mg):	.2mg	10%
Folacin (mcg):	3mcg	1%
Niacin (mg):	trace	2%
Caffeine (mg):	43mg	N/A
Alcohol (kcal):	0	N/A
% Refuse:		

### Food Exchanges

Grain (Starch):	0
Lean Meat:	0
Vegetable:	0
Fruit:	0
Non-Fat Milk:	0
Fat:	5 1/2
Other Carbohvdrates:	2 1/2

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.