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Food & Friends' **Cooking for Health Energy and Wellness (CHEW)** cooking classes have moved online! Learn basic principles of nutrition and cooking skills straight from our registered and licensed dietitians. We'll cover common and not-so-common food items, showcase different methods of food preparation and help you build confidence in the kitchen.

Intuitive Cooking

By **Agata Williams, RDN, LD**, *Food & Friends Community Dietitian*

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You probably heard that cooking at home is healthier and cheaper than eating out. It is likely that you heard, "Oh, just start cooking" or "cooking is easy!" But if you are just learning how to cook, you probably feel like you are bombarded with millions of recipes online, new cook books published literally every week, and everybody tempting you with the newest, healthiest, easiest recipes that there are.

How do you make sense of all of that?

How do you NOT get overwhelmed or frustrated, or simply lost?

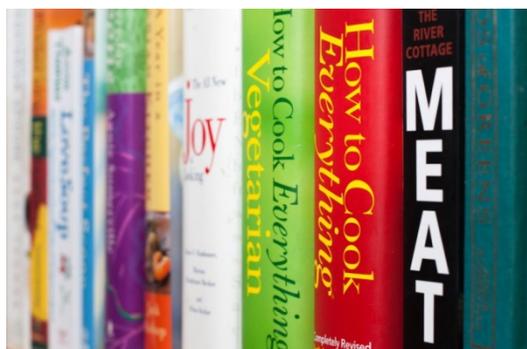
In this lesson I want to invite you on a journey across a recipe to help you figure out easier ways to prepare a meal. I will challenge you to look at the recipe in a different way to help you learn (almost intuitively) how to use it so that it works for you. With a little bit of practice you will realize that in a sense, all recipes are the same.

I often say that cooking is like driving. When you sit behind a wheel for the first time ever, you are overwhelmed. There is a speedometer and a gas pedal and a rear-view mirror and all these things that you need to pay attention to. 25 miles per hour may feel fast. But with time you get used to all of it, and you become more seasoned, safer driver. You get where you need to get and you realize that you use the same skills whether you are merging on I-495 or on I-66.

In cooking, the ingredients will change and the final dish will change as well, but the skills and the way you think about cooking will remain the same.

So buckle up, and let's go!

Forget reading the recipe the way you were reading it up to this point. Forget making long list of ingredients and following the directions exactly.



Rather than asking “What do I need to make it?” ask three questions that will allow you to look at the recipe in the new light:

- What are my base ingredients?
- What are my additions?
- What are my finishing touches?

I want to invite you to think about your individual recipe in the same way. Rather than reading it ingredient by ingredient, ask three basic questions:

What are my base ingredients?

Your base is the main, or the bulk ingredient of the dish. If you don't have this particular item, you simply cannot make the dish. For salad it will be lettuce, spinach, spring mix or any other combination of salad greens. For soup it will be broth/stock (usually meat/bones, onions, carrots, celery and/or other vegetable scraps).

What are my additions?

Additions are items that make “the body” of the dish – they effectively define the dish. “The body” for a Mediterranean salad would be feta cheese, tomatoes, peppers and olives. “The body” for a Mexican-style salad would be beans, tomatoes, peppers and corn. Potatoes would make “the body” of potato soup. “The body” of tomato soup would be of course made of tomatoes.

What are my finishing touches?

This is the area where a little knowledge and practice will be helpful. No worries, you will get there. Dressings, spices, sauces, flavorings, garnishes and “extras” fall into this category. Mediterranean salad will be the best with olive-oil based dressing. Mexican-style salad will sing with some shredded cheese and crispy strips of tortilla chips. Potato soup can use lots of marjoram and maybe a roll on the side. Tomato soup will be so much better with a dab of sour cream. *This* is where recipes may be the most helpful.

Let's put these into action!

Tomato Soup Ingredients

From Ree Drummond, Food Network
(Full recipe at end of lesson)

- 1 medium white or yellow onion (that will be cooked in) 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter (that will enrich the chicken base)
- Two 14.5-ounce cans diced tomatoes
- One 46-ounce bottle or can tomato juice
- 3 to 6 tablespoons sugar
- 1 or 2 tablespoons chicken base, or 3 chicken bouillon cubes
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup sherry, optional
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
- 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

There are few things in this recipe that we can evaluate immediately:

- 1 or 2 tablespoons chicken base, or 3 chicken bouillon cubes

Both chicken base and bouillon cubes will be very high in sodium. We can easily use homemade stock here (see "Making Your Own Broth or Stock" class). Store-brought stock or broth will work beautifully as well.

- 3 to 6 tablespoons sugar

That's a lot of sugar, mind you! While sugar helps cut some acidity to balance the flavors, you may consider just adding a touch of sugar at the end of the cooking process. You want your recipe to be healthy and you may find out that there is no need for 6 tablespoons (that would be an equivalent of roughly 18 packets of sugar!) of sugar in it.

Potato Soup Ingredients

From Classy.com
(Full recipe at end of lesson)

- 6 cups peeled and diced Russet potatoes (about 5 medium potatoes. Dice into small cubes about 3/4-inch)
- 1 1/2 cups chopped yellow onion (1 medium)
- 1 1/4 cups peeled and diced carrots (3 medium)
- 1 cup diced celery (2 stalks)
- 2 (14.5 oz) cans low-sodium chicken broth
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/3 cup butter
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream

Again, you can use home-made stock here as well. If you use vegetable stock, which you certainly can, you will make vegetarian version of this Potato Soup.

What can we learn?

- Carrots, celery and onions can be added to the soup base as enriching ingredients and they can be cooked in various ways, independent of the recipe itself.
- Look at the red ingredients again: When making tomato soup, could you use carrots and celery to add flavor, even though the recipe does not call for them? – absolutely! These ingredients would just add additional flavor and complexity.
- When making potato soup, could you cook the onion the way it is cooked in in the tomato soup recipe? – Yes! Whether it is a tomato or a potato soup, butter will add richness to your final dish.



- Let's say that you cooked your base to make potato soup and... you realize that you do not have potatoes. Funny, huh! Can you use canned tomatoes to make a tomato soup instead? – You probably answered 'yes'.
 - What about beans to make bean soup? – Absolutely! Your base can serve as base for any type of soup, there is almost no limits to that as long as you did not put any ingredients into the pot that will serve as the “body” of the dish. But once you put potatoes or tomatoes (or beans) into the pot, you are pretty much committing to making this particular dish.
 - Spices and finishing touches can make the dish. This is where a bit of practice and experience can come handy, but here are some tips that can get you started.
- What are the amounts of spices that the dish is calling for? – If a recipe asks for a comparatively large amount of a particular spice (for example a tablespoon of chili powder or paprika) chances are that this spice “makes the dish” and cannot be easily skipped. But if the recipe calls for “pinch of pepper flakes to taste” or “a dash of white pepper”, you can probably skip these and still end up with a good dish (you can almost always skip salt).
 - If you need to season or garnish a new dish, think what the finishing touches are in other **similar** dishes that you are already familiar with. Let's say that you make chili. To make it you probably use some beef, lots of beans and tomatoes. These are also main ingredients used in tacos, which you are probably familiar with. Therefore finishing your chili with spicy peppers (jalapeño), shredded cheese and a dab of sour cream is probably a reasonably safe bet.

Swap similar for similar

- Think about swapping one starch for another to make a dish healthier – we often replace white rice with brown rice, we can use quinoa instead of pasta.
- If you are swapping protein swap poultry for poultry (use chicken in place of turkey for example) or legumes for legumes (you can use red beans instead of black beans)
- If you are swapping produce think flavor profile and texture: in the salad for example you can swap zucchini for cucumber (both savory and crunchy) radishes for celery (crunchy with a nice flavor finish); you can swap blueberries for raspberries (both sweet and juicy and the same type of fruit)

Replace / change ingredient but be mindful of its' role

- One of the most common salad dressing is oil and vinegar (for example balsamic or red wine vinegar) dressing. Balsamic vinegar is acidic, so using 100% orange juice mixed with oil will work great as a salad dressing. Adding a bit of Dijon mustard will elevate this dressing to a whole new level! Just add a little and see how you like it, add more if you feel it needs it.
- Replacing spices in the recipe may be very helpful, especially if you realize that you do not have spice that the recipe calls for. See next slide for Super Five Swap!

Expand

- You can expand many recipes by adding additional “body” ingredients. How do you know what will work and what will not?... Look for the similarities. If the recipe calls for collard greens, you probably will be OK with kale – another dark green leafy vegetable. There are some common combinations that work well – potato and leek, potato and cauliflower and cauliflower and leek. You can add any of these (or both) to your potato soup, and any combination will be delicious, especially if you end up blending the soup at the end.

Super Five!

There are 5 heroes of your pantry: Parsley, Basil, Thyme, Cilantro and Tarragon.

If your recipe calls for a teaspoon of parsley and you realize that you do not have parsley, you can use any combination of remaining spices to “replace” parsley. Yes, the flavor will be changed, just a bit, but it will be fine. And this rule goes in every direction, so for example if you do not have basil, you can use any combination of any of the remaining spices.



Intuitive Cooking

Here are few words of inspiration from our Chef Trevor:

- **Have no fear. The best recipes may come from mistakes.**
- **Try everything (when it is safe).** Of course do not try raw meat or uncooked beans but when it comes to other ingredients and especially spices, try everything. How does it taste? Dry? Tangy? Sweet? Savory? Earthy? Is it a mild flavor? Does it have a “bite”? What will it do to the dish that you are making? Try adding it and see what happens. You may love it or if not, you will learn not to use it again.
- **Don't be rigid about cooking. Don't say “I cannot make it, because I don't have parsley”.** Using different spices may yield different a dish, but that's the beauty of it. Make it yours. Expand beyond “boxes” don't be afraid to experiment.

To start you on that journey next page provides list of spices that work with specific meats and other food products. Start there if you wish, but with time do not be afraid to venture outside these “boxes”.

Happy cooking! Have fun!

Questions? Contact Agata Williams, Food & Friends Community Dietitian
at awilliams@foodandfriends.org or (202) 269-6876.

Get more lessons and recipes at www.foodandfriends.org/nutrition



When cooking, the following items may be used for flavoring instead of salt or seasonings that contain sodium:

| Food Item | Flavorings |
|-------------------|--|
| Beef | Basil, bay leaf, caraway, curry, dill, dry mustard, garlic, grape jelly, green pepper, mace, marjoram, mushrooms (fresh), nutmeg, onion or onion powder, parsley, pepper, rosemary, sage |
| Chicken | Basil, cloves, cranberries, mace, mushrooms (fresh), nutmeg, oregano, paprika, parsley, pineapple, saffron, sage, savory, tarragon, thyme, tomato, turmeric |
| Egg | Chervil, curry, dill, dry mustard, garlic or garlic powder, green pepper, jelly, mushrooms (fresh), nutmeg, onion powder, paprika, parsley, rosemary, tarragon, tomato |
| Fish | Basil, bay leaf, chervil, curry, dill, dry mustard, green pepper, lemon juice, marjoram, mushrooms (fresh), paprika, pepper, tarragon, tomato, turmeric |
| Lamb | Cloves, curry, dill, garlic or garlic powder, mace, mint, mint jelly, onion, oregano, parsley, pineapple, rosemary, tarragon, thyme |
| Pork | Applesauce, basil, caraway, chives, cloves, garlic or garlic powder, onion or onion powder, rosemary, thyme |
| Veal | Apricots, basil, bay leaf, currant jelly, curry, ginger, marjoram, mushrooms (fresh), oregano, paprika |
| Vegetables | Basil, dill, garlic or garlic powder, ginger, lemon juice, mace, marjoram, nutmeg, onion or onion powder, tarragon, tomato, sugar or sugar substitute, salt-free salad dressing, vinegar |
| Desserts | Allspice, anise, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, mace, nutmeg, vanilla extract, other extracts |

Source: https://www.nutritioncaremanual.org/client_ed.cfm?ncm_client_ed_id=138



FOOD & FRIENDS®

Creamy Tomato Soup

Delivering hope, one meal at a time®



Intuitive Cooking

Serves:

6—8

Prep Time:

25 Minutes

Total Time:

25 minutes

Recipe modified from:

Ree Drummond,
Food Network

Ingredients:

- ◆ 1 medium white or yellow onion
- ◆ 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter
- ◆ Two 14.5-ounce cans diced tomatoes
 - ^ *Use low-sodium*
- ◆ One 46-ounce bottle or can tomato juice
 - ^ *Use low-sodium*
- ◆ 3 to 6 tablespoons sugar
 - ^ *May be to much; start with three, or add sugar at the end to taste*
- ◆ 1 or 2 tablespoons chicken base, or 3 chicken bouillon cubes
 - ^ *Use stock from the other Food & Friends class, or Low-sodium chicken stock*
- ◆ Freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ 1 cup sherry, optional
- ◆ 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
 - ^ *May use plain yogurt instead*





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Creamy Tomato Soup

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Directions:

1. To begin, dice the onion. Melt the butter in a large pot or Dutch oven. Throw in the onion and cook until translucent.
2. Now dump in the diced tomatoes and stir to combine. Add the tomato juice.
3. Next - and this is important - in order to combat the acidity of the tomatoes add 3 to 6 tablespoons of sugar. Now, you'll want to start on the low side, then taste and add more as needed. Some tomatoes and juice have more of an acidic bite than others. (For what it's worth, and I realize it's not worth much, I use 6 tablespoons of sugar.)
^ Start with 3 or skip for now
4. Next, add 1 or 2 tablespoons chicken base to the pot. I added 3, and it wound up being a little too much.
5. Now you can add lots of freshly ground black pepper. Stir to combine, then heat almost to a boil. Then turn off the heat.
6. Add in the sherry if desired. Stir in the cream. Add the basil and parsley and stir.
7. Serve the soup warm!

Serves:

6—8

Prep Time:

25 Minutes

Total Time:

25 minutes

Recipe modified from:

Ree Drummond,
Food Network





FOOD & FRIENDS®

Creamy Potato Soup

Delivering hope, one meal at a time®



Intuitive Cooking

Serves:

5

Prep Time:

30 Minutes

Total Time:

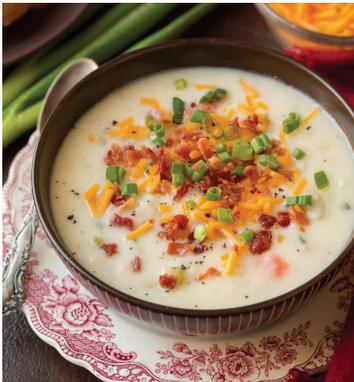
50 minutes

Recipe taken from:

Cooking Classy

Ingredients:

- ◆ 6 cups peeled and diced Russet potatoes (about 5 medium potatoes. Dice into small cubes about 3/4-inch)
- ◆ 1 1/2 cups chopped yellow onion (1 medium)
- ◆ 1 1/4 cups peeled and diced carrots (3 medium)
- ◆ 1 cup diced celery (2 stalks)
- ◆ 2 (14.5 oz) cans low-sodium chicken broth
- ◆ Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ 1/3 cup butter
- ◆ 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- ◆ 2 1/2 cups milk
- ◆ 1/2 cup sour cream*
- ◆ 1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley





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Creamy Potato Soup

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Directions:

1. Combine diced potatoes, carrots, celery and onions with chicken broth in a large stockpot and season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. Cover pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat (it will take about 10 minutes to reach a boil), once it reaches a boil reduce heat to medium and continue to cook about 15 - 20 minutes longer until potatoes are very soft when pierced with a fork.
3. Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan melt butter over medium heat, add flour and cook for 1 minute while whisking constantly. While whisking, slowly add milk and cook, stirring constantly until mixture begins lightly bubble and thicken.
4. Once potatoes are soft add thickened milk mixture to potato soup mixture and stir (potatoes should start breaking down into soup, if not cook a few minutes longer). Add sour cream and mix well.
5. Ladle soup into serving bowls, top each serving with bacon or ham, cheddar cheese and green onions (Note that the soup will thicken as it rests so if you happen to have left overs you can thin with a little water or milk).

Serves:

5

Prep Time:

30 Minutes

Total Time:

50 minutes

Recipe taken from:

Cooking Classy

For Serving:

Crumbled bacon or chopped cooked ham , shredded cheddar cheese, chopped green onions or chives

Recipe Notes

Try substituting heavy cream or half and half for the sour cream. It is also such a delicious option.

