

OPRAH & YOU BETTER TOGETHER SWEEPSTAKES DETAILS p4

270 POUNDS AND COUNTING: LEARN THEIR WEIGHT-LOSS SECRETS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016

# weightwatchers

## How to Cook EVERYTHING!

SPECIAL COOKING SCHOOL ISSUE

**28**  
INSANELY DELICIOUS RECIPES

**23** HEALTHY SWAPS

**109** EXPERT TRICKS

**\*10** WAYS TO MAKE YOUR WORKOUT EASIER p58

**PLUS!**

FEEL BETTER & BE HAPPIER AT WORK TODAY p40

**KITCHEN ZEN:** FEED YOUR BODY AND SOUL p34

\$4.99 USA

\$4.99US



WeightWatchers.com





# carrots, onions, and inner peace

Cooking mindfully not only eases stress but makes the entire process—from prep to plate—an experience to savor.

BY CINDY KUZMA

➔ When the smoke alarm goes off, it's hard to think of cooking as a refuge.

I'd always viewed it that way—an oasis in the daily grind of e-mail alerts, deadlines, and work commitments. After all, every meal offers the chance for an immediate, tangible reward. When the walls of my workday close in, I can always stir sautéed carrots, onions, and celery

into boiling lentils and end up with a tasty soup.

Lately, though, I've let distractions creep into the kitchen. I work late, and then scramble to assemble a meal as my husband walks in the door. I delete e-mails with one hand as the other blindly swirls a spoon. I answer a call while the pot simmers, and just as I hang up, the broth boils away, begins to

burn, and—bingo—there's the smoke alarm. Ugh!

I needed to get that feeling of sanctuary back into the kitchen. I've long aimed to cultivate mindfulness in my life—awareness, attention, and staying in the present moment—and “mindful cooking” is a real thing. It seemed the perfect combination to explore.

Dana Velden, a Zen priest and

chef who cooked in monastery kitchens for 15 years, suggests we all start by putting a bowl of lemons on our counters—a simple but powerful statement.

“Lemons are an ingredient you'll want to have around anyway—and they're beautiful,” says Velden, author of *Finding Yourself in the Kitchen: Kitchen Meditations and Inspired Recipes from a Mindful Cook*.





PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; STOCKSY.

“They’re a bright, cheery color. And they’ve got a little bit of a scent, especially if you run your fingernail over the surface and release some of the oils.”

That one change captures the essence of mindful cooking: Whenever possible, engage your five senses and let them bring you into the present. Experts also list useful tools—time, ingredients, and more—to help

arouse those senses:

- **Make instinct a utensil.** Relying on your senses moment to moment may make you a better cook, says Becky Schmooke, a chef who runs Becky’s Mindful Kitchen, a cooking school in the Iowa countryside. She frequently eschews measuring tools, encouraging students to let their senses guide them. “Cooking shouldn’t be mechanical—following instructions, doing it exactly one way,” she says. “Embrace your palate. If you want more spice, add more spice, no matter what the recipe says.”

- **Slow down and open up to the experience.** Removing safety nets like measuring cups can trigger fear in the inexperienced cook, of course—the exact opposite of what one tries to achieve with mindful cooking. “People have so much anxiety about being in the kitchen,” says Meredith Klein, a Los Angeles-based private chef and mindful-cooking teacher. Make the kitchen your safe place to experiment. Working deliberately, taking a few deep breaths, and approaching meal preparation with an open mind can help calm the fight-or-flight stress response, she notes.

- **Expect mistakes—and improvise solutions.** Sure, you might burn or cut yourself while cooking, but otherwise “the stakes are low,” says Velden. While preparing the chicken for the grill, you (literally) butcher it? Roast and shred it instead, Schmooke says. Overcook the rice? Swap in a plate of greens.

- **Let ingredients help set the tone.** Knowing where your food comes from—and how it impacts the earth—provides a full-circle view that can further enhance your cooking experience, says Carley Hauck, an instructor in “mindful nourishment” at the Stanford University Center for Integrative Medicine and founder of Intuitive Wellness. Whenever possible, keep it fresh and local.

- **Go naked (sort of).** “Don’t bring anything into the kitchen that doesn’t belong there,” Velden says—which means no



smart devices to tempt you to e-mail or check social media. “Take a break and say to yourself, ‘I’m cooking. I can’t solve that problem right now. I’m just going to focus on the immediate pleasure in front of me.’”

- **Let what happens in the kitchen branch out into the world.** A funny thing goes on when you cook mindfully, say our experts. If you make the best of your mess, you could be more likely to roll with the punches the rest of the day, too. Forgive yourself for screwing up while cooking and you may also find it easier to absolve others. “That sense of presence—looking for the beauty, being aware and appreciative of the world around you and your life, even when it’s challenging and difficult—can be cultivated in the kitchen so that it becomes a part of how you map the world around you,” Velden says.

**Now, it’s time for me to cook.** I choose mushroom and cheese tacos with poached eggs.

My first step? I pile lemons into a ceramic bowl hand thrown by a friend and instantly feel my mood lift. Then I hit a local farm store to buy creminis, garlic, spinach, eggs, and cheese, all sourced from within 75 miles of my Chicago home.

I plan to improvise, but need a recipe for homemade corn tortillas. It’s the lone piece of paper on the counter.

I take a deep breath, clear my mind, and begin. And yes, my senses come alive. The tortilla dough squishes between my

fingers, the olive oil sizzles in the skillet, and the steady rhythm of chopping spinach keeps me in the groove. I taste a raw mushroom; then take another bite after they soften and darken, marveling at the transformation. And by paying close attention, I know—in a way I’ve never before—the exact moment to add the garlic so it caramelizes, not burns, bringing a whole new depth to the flavor.

Is the meal perfect? Not quite—I poach eggs in the same pan and overcook the yolks, and the tortillas crumble a bit too enthusiastically. But when I combine all the elements, there’s no doubt I’ve done far more right than wrong, from the freshness of the veggies and cheese to the finishing squeeze from one of my countertop lemons. Without the stress of the day swirling in my mind or the shrillness of the smoke detector ringing in my ears, I’m able to let the imperfections slide—and eat with more peace and calmness than dinner has brought in a very long time.

## BRING ZEN TO YOUR KITCHEN

**Want to try mindful cooking for yourself? Follow these additional tips from mindful cooks Velden, Klein, Schmooke, and Hauck.**

- **CLEAR YOUR SPACE.** Your kitchen doesn’t have to be spotless, but it should be free of clutter that impedes your efforts.

- **NARROW YOUR FOCUS.** Chopping onions, stirring soup, tossing salad—immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of each task.

- **PAUSE FREQUENTLY.** Acknowledge the moment. Take a few deep breaths. Scan your body for physical tension—then release it.

- **PRACTICE GRATITUDE.** Before you eat, give thanks. A simple grace, religious or not, can help foster joy and appreciation.