

# Food from Scratch: An Investment Worth Making

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How often do you prepare fresh, home-cooked meals or snacks? In today's fast-paced society, many of us rely heavily on fast food, frozen dinners and other pre-made or packaged foods. Finding time to prepare our own meals and snacks may be difficult to fit into our schedules, but doing so can provide many benefits that will help our hectic lives.

While the convenience of pre-made meals and foods can save time, it can be quite pricey. Making your own version of the foods you typically buy will keep both your wallet and your stomach satisfied. You will often find that you prefer the homemade food! Trying out new recipes and experimenting in the kitchen allows you to customize the food to your own taste. In addition to making the food based on your favorite flavors, you will also have more control over your dietary preferences such as how much sodium, fat and added sugar you desire in the food.

Another benefit of making your foods from scratch is that you will avoid many of the additives, preservatives, and artificial flavors often found in packaged foods. Using more whole, unprocessed ingredients can create an overall healthier product. In an ideal world, eating a diet of entirely whole foods would be the goal. But for most people, this is simply not realistic. And that's okay! Understanding the spectrum of processed foods may help in the smarter selection of food products to include in your diet. Generally speaking, processed foods include multiple, sometimes unrecognizable, ingredients while whole foods contain minimal ingredients, often times only one...the food itself! However, it is important to keep in mind that, even if your meal is filled with whole, healthy ingredients, consuming too much can lead to weight gain. Make your meals, but continue to be mindful of the amount you eat.

With a little planning, cooking from scratch can be a fulfilling and valuable habit to begin. Avoid an all-or-nothing mentality and start by making just one or two new foods or meals from scratch. Pair some store-bought foods with homemade foods. For example, try making your own hummus and enjoy with carrot sticks and store-bought pita chips. Whip up some pasta sauce made from scratch and serve over the whole wheat pasta you purchased at the store. There are countless, simple ways to introduce more homemade foods into the diet. Pick up a cookbook or find a recipe online, cook it up and take pride in your homemade creation!

## *Spectrum of processed foods*

- ❖ **Minimally processed foods: often pre-prepped for convenience**
  - Pre-washed Spinach, cut vegetables, roasted nuts
- ❖ **Foods processed at their peak to lock in nutritional quality and freshness**
  - Canned beans, canned tomatoes, frozen fruit/vegetables, canned tuna
- ❖ **Foods with ingredients added for flavor and texture (sweeteners, spices, oils, colors, preservatives)**
  - Jarred pasta sauce, salad dressing, yogurt, cake mix
- ❖ **More heavily processed: ready-to-eat foods**
  - Crackers, bread, cereal, deli meat
- ❖ **Most heavily processed: frozen or pre-made meals**
  - Pizza, microwaveable dinners

Try out these delicious, good-for-the-soul recipes this winter season  
courtesy of HSC Cafeteria, WVU Healthcare.

**Cornbread made with Stone Ground Cornmeal** Serves: 18

Ingredients:

2 ½ cups All Purpose Flour	2/3 cup skim milk
1 ¾ cup cornmeal, whole grain	2 ¼ tsp. lemon juice
1/8 tsp. salt	½ cup egg or egg substitute
¼ cup sugar	1 ½ lb. plain yogurt, fat free
1 2/3 tsp. baking soda	

Instructions:

Mix together flour, cornmeal, salt, and baking soda. Mix milk with yogurt, lemon juice, and water. In mixing bowl, beat egg or egg substitute and sugar. Alternately add dry ingredients and yogurt/milk mixture, beating after each addition. Pour into muffin pan sprayed with cooking spray. Pour 1/3 cup batter into each. Baking at 350 degrees for approximately 20 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

**Martha's Vegetarian Chile** (In memory of Martha Nesser, Well WVU and Food Service Consultant in Long Term Care)  
Serves: 6

Ingredients:

2 ½ cups kidney beans	14 oz. can diced tomatoes
1 cup bulgur wheat	6 oz. can tomato paste, diluted with 3 cans of water
2 cups chopped onion	1-cup tomato juice
2 cloves garlic, chopped	2 tsp. basil
1 cup chopped green pepper	2 tsp. chile powder
¼ cup diced carrots	1 tsp. cumin
¼ cup diced celery	¼ tsp. cinnamon

Instructions:

Place bulgur wheat in bowl. Heat tomato juice to boiling and add to the bulgur wheat. Stir and let stand approximately 15 minutes. Sautee onions, carrots, peppers and seasonings in a non-stick pan. Heat tomatoes, tomato paste, water, sautéed vegetables and seasonings for 15 minutes. Add kidney beans to simmering pot. Just 15 minutes before serving, add bulgur/ tomato juice mixture.

To learn more about cooking from scratch, contact a registered dietitian in your area and/or check out [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).



*Natalie is currently a Dietetic Intern at WVU Healthcare. Karina is pursuing her Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences at WVU. As some of the nation's food and nutrition experts, they are committed to improving the health of their community and plan on becoming Registered Dietitians. To find a registered dietitian in your area, visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and click on "Find a Registered Dietitian."*