



7 Reasons Millennials Should Bring Back Dinner Parties

By Andrew Beauchesne
April 29 2016

Sometimes it feels like my generation grew up on takeout, delivery, and convenience foods, and as a result, never gained kitchen skills. I am no different. At the start of my [plant-based journey](#), I spent months eating just roasted sweet potatoes for dinner because I didn't have the patience or skill to cook something more elaborate. I ate so many sweet potatoes that my skin would turn orange after a few days—that's when I would switch to red and white potatoes for a day. I felt amazing [eating so many potatoes](#), so I didn't rush to learn how to cook. To give myself credit, I did make my own hummus and the occasional veggie-lover's [pizza](#).

We're all so busy doing that we forget cooking doesn't have to be just another task to complete. Cooking can be the highlight of the day, or even the major event of a Friday night. This weekend, invite some friends over and reclaim your cooking skills. I promise you and your guests will appreciate the change of pace, even if the food doesn't come out perfect! If you are anything like I was in college (not Martha Stewart), start with an easy crowd-pleaser like [pesto pasta](#) or [bean chili](#).

Here are my favorite reasons to cook for friends and family at home:

1. Cooking Can Be Fun, Social, and Communal

Cooking doesn't have to be a stressful chore, and it certainly doesn't have to be overly complicated or difficult. It can be fun, creative, and social. It can also be relaxing and reflective. For entertaining, choose recipes you're excited to make. I like to welcome guests with simple, hearty meals like soup and lasagna or a big salad and pasta. While you cook, put on some music or an interesting podcast or invite your guests over early for some conversation.

2. Cooking at Home Is Healthier

Although there are obvious benefits to social connections and being with friends, cooking at home is also associated with a healthier diet. One study found that individuals who frequently cooked at home consumed less sugar, fat, and calories than those who

relied on fast food, restaurant meals, and pre-packaged meals¹.

Restaurants are notorious for packing salt, sugar, and oil into their dishes. In fact, researchers at Tufts University found that 92% of restaurants exceeded recommended caloric requirements for a single meal, and about a third exceeded caloric requirements for an entire day².

3. Cooking at Home Saves You Money

I am someone who doesn't mind spending a few extra bucks for higher quality food. That being said, I'm a millennial, and one thing we all have in common is our tendency to comparison shop for just about everything. Fortunately, you can save big bucks by cooking at home if you base your meals on [low-cost vegan staples](#) (lentils, potatoes, rice, oats, bananas, and frozen vegetables). Try to cook almost everything entirely from scratch, especially dips and spreads. That hummus I used to eat everyday comes to mind here. Why pay \$5 for a tub of the stuff when you can whip together a blender full of [healthier hummus](#) for half the price?

4. You Have Full Control Over the Ingredients and the Ambiance

Although it's great to support your favorite local vegetarian restaurants, cooking at home for friends gives you control of the ambiance, music, seating, and ingredients. When you cook for your friends, you control what goes into your food and, perhaps more importantly, what doesn't go in. You can also control the mood with lighting and music, whether you are hosting a celebratory party, a romantic dinner, or a relaxing evening with friends. Make it more casual with a family-style spread or more festive with a theme like Tex-Mex or Indian.

5. Cooking is a Great Time to Slow Down and Practice Mindfulness

Sometimes we need a reminder that we are not at the office—or in my case, the research center—and to slow down. Cooking can be done at any pace. Look at the recipe ahead of time and chop your veggies and pre-

(continued)

7 Reasons Millennials Should Bring Back Dinner Parties

By Andrew Beauchesne
April 29 2016

measure ingredients so you don't feel rushed. Take your time and remind yourself that there is no where else you need to be. And kick off your work shoes for some slippers or thick socks!

Mindfulness means purposefully paying attention in the present moment. And there's a reason why it's increasing in popularity: recent studies have found powerful healing effects at all levels of the body, from telomeres³, to the immune system⁴, and the brain⁵. If you have a formal practice established already, you might find cooking to be a wonderful time to 'bridge the gap' between formal practice and the informal application of mindfulness in daily life. Try being mindful while you water-sauté veggies, mince garlic, or stand by the stove waiting for water to boil.

6. Cooking Gives You An Opportunity to Explore Your Community

Find some new and exciting ingredients for your dishes with vegetables, fruits, and grains you've never tried before. Check out your local farmer's market. It takes a little extra planning, but it's worth the extra freshness. If you're a little more adventurous and live near some ethnic markets, then leave your culinary bubble and visit some Mexican, Middle-Eastern, or Asian markets. You might just discover your next-favorite spice or vegetable to cook with or fruit to snack on.

7. Your Guests Will Appreciate It

Chances are your friends and family want to be healthy and dread the restaurant bills and bloat. It's time to change the standard belief that being social always means going out to fancy dinners, bars, or night clubs. By eating in and hosting, you'll be helping to break the weekend cycle for your sake and the sake of your friends. Everyone loves a home-cooked meal, especially one that makes you feel good from the inside out. Eating in also gives everyone the chance to linger and enjoy more quality time together.

References:

1. Wolfson JA, Bleich SN. Is cooking at home associated with better diet quality or weight-loss intention? *Public Health Nutr.* 2015 June;18(8):1397-406.
2. Urban LE, McCrory MA, Dallal GE, et al. Accuracy of Stated Energy Contents of Restaurant Foods. *JAMA.* 2011;306(3):287-293.
3. Schutte NS, Malouff JM. A meta-analytic review of the effects of mindfulness meditation on telomerase activity. *Psychoneuroendocrinology.* 2014 Apr;42:45-48.

4. Black DS, Slavich GM. Mindfulness meditation and the immune system: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Ann N Y Acad Sci.* 2016 Jan

21;1-12.

5. Hölzel BK, Carmody J, Vangel M, et al. Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Res.* 2011 Jan 30; 191(1):36-43.