

# Celebrate your Inner Chef at Home



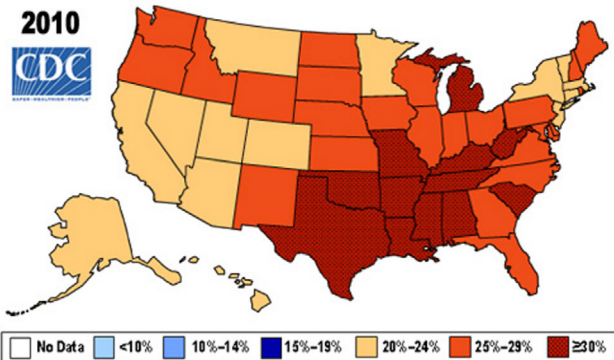
*Whether you're a seasoned home cook or a master of the ready-made foods menu, we are here to help you become more efficient and inspired in your kitchen.*

*This correspondence course was funded by a grant from the Colorado Health Foundation and brought to you by CACFP Sponsors United for Health. The mission of the CACFP Sponsors United for Health is to support providers in the serving of nutritious meals that build a basic foundation of healthy lifetime eating habits for the children in their care.*

Let's begin by taking a look at reasons for cooking at home. With the abundance of fast food, deli food, frozen packaged food, and restaurants all around, why go to the trouble cooking at home? For starters, cooking at home can be faster than going out. You're cooking on your terms, as far as time is concerned.

Another reason is that it's far cheaper to cook at home than it is to buy take-out or eat at restaurants night after night, especially once you've gathered some basic ingredients. Cooking for yourself also allows you more flexibility than using prepared foods or ordering at a restaurant. A lot of us have that one choosy eater in our family—hold the mayo, no cheese, won't eat green vegetables, etc.

And finally, cooking for yourself, generally, is healthier. You control the amounts of fat, sodium, carbs, or any other substance. In terms of calories, portion control is as easy as deciding how much food to put on your plate. So, why should we cook at home? It saves time, money, and calories.



The Centers for Disease Control reports that during the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States and rates remain high. More than one-third of U.S. adults (35.7%) and approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2–19 years are obese.

In 2011, the prevalence of adult obesity in Colorado was 20.7%. (At that time, no state was under 20%.)

Currently, 17% of US children and adolescents 2-19 years are obese. Since 1980, child obesity prevalence has tripled. We are just hearing about new reports that state we are making small strides in reducing childhood obesity.

The first step towards celebrating your inner chef is identifying your cooking style. As we said earlier, when you know what makes you happy in the kitchen, cooking will become much more fun.

**1. Read the descriptions to the left, which one most closely matches your style and preferences?**

## What's Your Cooking Style?

<b>Loves to cook:</b> Lots of cookbooks, watch cooking shows, want to own a restaurant	<b>Includes music:</b> Plays music while cooking and during dinner, dances in the kitchen	<b>Creates Art:</b> Presentation is a priority, sets the table well, loves color
<b>Looking to Grow:</b> Loves the farmer's market, being in the garden and growing veggies	<b>Plays with gadgets:</b> Loves kitchen equipment and cool tools/gadgets	<b>Assembles dishes:</b> Keeps prepared ingredients on hand, skips cooking from scratch

Try taking the following quiz to help find your cooking style. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers, you might even find that you have jumped to the wrong conclusion about your style or that you have more than one cooking style!

1. If you could splurge on one item in your kitchen, what would it be?

- A) A sharp knife.
- B) An iPod dock with speakers.
- C) A colorful serving bowl.
- D) Fresh herbs.
- E) A garlic press.
- F) A personal chef.

2. Aside from time and money, what prevents you from cooking?
- A) Lack of challenge.
  - B) Lack of inspiration.
  - C) I don't like making dishes that turn out looking blah.
  - D) Lack of fresh ingredients.
  - E) Boring preparation.
  - F) An overcomplicated recipe.
3. What is your favorite part of your kitchen?
- A) I couldn't possibly pick a favorite! I love every part of my kitchen.
  - B) I like the space that's closest to the dining area, so that I can hear the music and conversation from guests.
  - C) The walls. I love the paint color and art that I've added to the space.
  - D) The fruit bowl and any other spaces that collect and display fresh foods.
  - E) My gadget drawer. I've got some fun cooking tools to play with.
  - F) The clear, clean countertops.
4. What makes cooking fun for you?
- A) The challenge of exploring a new technique or ingredient.
  - B) I enjoy singing and dancing while I cook.
  - C) I love the look of the finished dish, all laid out and ready to go.
  - D) I get a kick out of interesting, fresh, and local ingredients.
  - E) I love using fun new tools to get the job done.
  - F) I like it when I can throw all the ingredients in a pot and call it dinner.
5. How do you approach a new recipe?
- A) With gusto!
  - B) I try to match the type of food and the region the flavors are from with some of my favorite music. That way, I can really set the stage for fun in the kitchen.
  - C) I look carefully at how the recipe treats the ingredients and how that will impact the final presentation of the dish.
  - D) I generally grab what I want from the farmer's market or CSA box, then look for a recipe that uses it all.
  - E) If I've just gotten a new kitchen tool like a potato ricer or Crockpot, I scour the internet for recipes that will put it to use.
  - F) I look at how many steps and how much ingredient preparation is required. If it's too involved, I skip it.

### Answer Key:

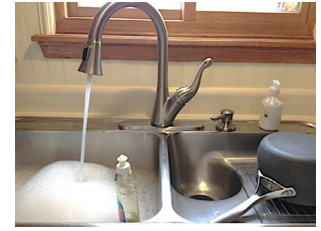
Now let's figure out what cooking style most closely matches your cooking experience. Tally up the number of times you chose each letter.

If you got mostly the letter...

- A) You're a **Master Chef**: What can we say -- you love to cook! You will get the most pleasure out of high-quality equipment and the occasional challenging recipe. It's also a good idea to look for opportunities to innovate while you cook.
- B) You're a **Musician**: Adding music to your kitchen will make it much more fun. Invest in a music player that you can keep in the kitchen, and find a place to store it that is safe from flying sauces.
- C) You're an **Artist**: Colorful kitchen gadgets will add zing to your space and make it much more appealing. Pay attention to the presentation when selecting recipes and you'll have more fun with the whole process.
- D) You're a **Gardener**: Get yourself a pot of live herbs, stat! This a great way to start growing ingredients right in your kitchen, and really, how fun is it to snip off a few leaves of basil and toss them into a pot of sauce?
- E) You're an **Engineer**: Kitchen gadgets are your friends. Find a good place to store your tools, and select the ones that will make the biggest difference in your kitchen.
- F) You're a **Minimalist**: A clear fridge and freezer is an absolute must for any minimalist. That way, you'll have plenty of room to store prepared ingredients for your next recipe.



There are three main areas of a kitchen. Can you guess each one? The three areas are prep space, cooking space, and cleaning space. Each of these areas need adequate space, equipment, and organization.



## Prep Area Needs

- Big, non-slip cutting board
- Sharp knives and peelers
- Utensils, like spoons and spatulas
- A clean refrigerator /freezer
- **Elbow room**
- Mixing bowls



**Gardener:** Room to grow fresh herbs and ripen tomatoes

**Master Chef or Engineer:** A good-quality knife set

**Artist or Minimalist:** Simple, colorful tools like measuring cups

**Musician:** Space for a music feature

Let's start with **Prep Area Needs**- Do you have food on your counters? How about excess knickknacks? Appliances? Your prep space should have room for equipment, like a large cutting board and mixing bowl, along with space to set items that are being prepared. It can be miserable to prepare a salad on a small warped board that slides all over the place. And if you're constantly miserable, you won't be cooking well in your kitchen.

Tip: place a dampened dishcloth or paper towel under a cutting board that slides around.

**Cooking Area Needs**- Is your cooking area optimized for efficiency? Are the pots and pans organized by size and frequency of use, or piled in an unwieldy stack? Do you have enough room to work? Is the oven clean? What about the stove? How easy is it to reach your oven mitts?

Asking yourself these questions will help you in creating a cooking area that works well for you.

## Cooking Area Needs

- Spices and herbs
- Oils
- Variety of pots/pans/utensils
- **Elbow room**
- Clean stove and oven
- Oven mitts



**Gardener:** Easily accessible spice and herb mixes

**Master Chef or Engineer:** Good-quality pots and pans

**Artist or Minimalist:** Nonstick pots and pans

**Musician or Artist:** Timer for tracking when foods are done

## Cleaning Area Needs

- Space for dirty items
- Great scrubbing brush
- Detergent/soap
- **Elbow room**
- A drying rack
- Dishcloths and towels



**Gardener:** Window to garden or space for seedlings

**Master Chef or Engineer:** elaborate drying rack

**Artist or Minimalist:** Efficient scrubby brush, pretty kitchen towels

**Musician:** Non-slip floor mat for dancing

**Cleaning Area Needs**- What does your sink area look like? Is there a large place for dirty items as they get used and can be set aside? Do you have enough room to wash and rinse your dishes? And where can you put all of the items you want to dry? Of course a big dishwasher is great, but some things should be hand-washed.

Safety is key too. Is the place where you store cleaning supplies child-proof? How can you keep children away from the sharp utensils awaiting cleaning? Once again, you will find your answers in the questions.

Did you notice the one element that is mentioned in all three areas of your kitchen? (Answer: Elbow room). What does this element's repetition indicate about its importance? (Answer: Yes, it's pretty important). Elbow room is a mix of adequate space, effective equipment, and area organization.

## Now that we've covered the three key spaces in a kitchen, let's look at some equipment.

First off, there are four tasks to keep your refrigerator and freezer user friendly: eliminate items, think food safety, store prepped ingredients, and freeze leftovers.

Here are some tips to help you to de-clutter your fridge and freezer:

- If it's too packed, you won't be able to find anything, so all your food is less useful.
- If you won't ever use it, throw it out!
- Don't want to waste food? Make soup with leftovers that are crowding the fridge. Try this once per week.
- If it's messy, it's less inviting and you will be less likely to feel inspired when deciding what to cook.

Once you have de-cluttered the fridge and freezer, you can use them to help you cook. The fridge is key to food safety, offering space to chill foods fast and decrease the odds of contracting foodborne illnesses. Keep in mind the components of food safety when cooking:

- clean: wash hands and surfaces often
- separate: don't cross contaminate
- cook: cook to proper temperatures
- chill: refrigerate promptly

To save time on a busy day, you can prep ingredients for a meal early, then store them in the fridge until you need them for the meal. Try prepping all your ingredients for the week and putting the items in zippered bags. It's a lot faster and easier on the old eyes to chop an onion or two all at once and then store what you don't need to use right away.

Your freezer can be used as a warehouse for leftovers that will make easy meals later in the week. If you have a large family or often feed a crowd (Is a group of daycare children considered a crowd?), consider investing in a second refrigerator or freezer for the garage. A second appliance can help extend shelf life of foods because the door of the storage freezer doesn't get opened and closed as often.

Of course there is the essential equipment, such as pots and pans, cooking spoons and knives. But the following pieces of cooking equipment can help make your job easier:

- A **timer** is essential for busy people and cooks who get easily distracted.
- **Rice cooker** makes it so easy to make brown rice and other grains.
- Most of us already know the benefits of a **microwave** in the kitchen for ease of warming up foods.
- **Panini makers** are great for black bean quesadillas, grilled vegetable sandwiches, and garlic toast.
- A **bread machine** makes it so easy to make dough. Pizza becomes a 20 minute process and can include whole grain flours. How much do you spend on frozen and delivery pizza? The ingredients for batch of dough from a bread machine costs less than one dollar.
- **Griddles** make it much easier to make omelets and pancakes in large quantities.
- **CrockPots** cook dried beans without supervision. This will help you save money by skipping canned beans and is especially great for making chili.
- **Blender** or **food processor** is great for smoothies, cream soups, bean dip, and salsa.

Here are some various cooking tools for each chef, of course, you can mix and match for yourself!

**Master Chef/Engineer:** breadmaker and good knives

**Artist/Minimalist:** ricer cooker, panini maker

**Gardener:** greens spinner, blender

**Musician:** salad set, CrockPot



When you have completed this course,  
click **HERE** to take the test.

(or you can type this address into your browser:

<http://tinyurl.com/CelebrateYourInnerChefAtHome>)

# Do You Have an Efficient Kitchen?

## 10 Ways to Test Kitchen Efficiency:

Place a check mark next to each statement that is true in your kitchen...

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have enough room to work on your counters?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Are your cutting boards easily accessible and in good condition?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have a variety of sharp knives that are easy to find and use?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ How is your stock of cooking utensils? Do you have adequate spoons, ladles, spatulas, etc?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have enough pots and pans? Can you find the lids?
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Are your microwave-safe containers organized and easy to find?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have enough storage containers and bags? (These will make storing "planned overs" and packing healthful lunches a breeze!)
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have the equipment you need in order to make your job easier?  
This could be...
  - Microwave
  - Toaster oven
  - Food processor and/or blender
  - Rice cooker
  - Stand mixer or hand mixer
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Is your freezer clean with relatively new foods? An organized freezer makes your job much easier.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you clean your refrigerator on a weekly basis? It's best to do this when you return from a grocery run. Seriously, take the time to clean and organize your fridge.
  - Discard old food
  - Prep fruits and veggies for easy consumption



Give yourself a point for every item checked...

- 1-3 points: You've got some work to do.
- 4-6 points: Good start! Try our tips.
- 7-10 points: You have an efficient kitchen!

## For Fast Meals, Keep These Items on Hand:

### Dry:

- ✓ Pasta and pasta sauce
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Oil and vinegar
- ✓ Spices, herbs, seasonings
- ✓ Whole grain bread and cereals
- ✓ Canned beans and soups
- ✓ Tuna

### Refrigerated:

- ✓ Skim milk
- ✓ Fat-free yogurt and sour cream
- ✓ Orange juice
- ✓ Fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Parmesan cheese
- ✓ Trans fat-free margarine

### Frozen:

- ✓ Frozen veggie assortments
- ✓ Veggie burgers
- ✓ Nut & seeds

# Use MyPlate to Stock Your Kitchen

## Fruits:

- **Fresh** fruit is nature's best snack, complete with its own wrapper.
- **Frozen** fruits are especially delicious in baked desserts.
- **Canned** fruits, especially those canned in fruit juice, can add variety to your meals.
- **Dried** fruits add pizzazz to salads, rice, and pasta dishes.

## Vegetables:

- **Frozen vegetable medleys and chopped onion** are great time savers.
- **Fresh vegetables** like zucchini, broccoli, cauliflower, etc are easy to prepare. Look for store specials to get even more nutrients for your money.
- **Canned tomatoes** with no added salt but additional ingredients (with basil, fire-roasted, with peppers etc) are very convenient because they add many flavors from a single can.
- **Pasta sauce**, no-salt-added tomato sauce, and tomato paste are the workhorses of a heart-healthy kitchen.

## Grains:

- **Instant brown rice** is a whole grain that cooks in only 5-10 minutes. Save money by making large batches of brown rice and freezing it in small portions that you can use later.
- **Small pastas** like macaroni, rotelle, penne, rotini, and mini shells all cook quickly in the skillet or microwave as part of "one pot" meals. Often they don't need to be boiled and drained first.
- **Whole wheat pitas and tortillas** are super versatile. Use them to make personal pizzas or wraps, or toast them and pile a salad on top for a tasty take on the tostada.
- **Quick cooking barley** is a speedy and healthful addition to soups, risottos, and pilafs.



## Protein:

- **Canned beans** add tons of fiber and nutrients to every meal. Just give them a rinse and add them to whatever you're cooking.
- **Split peas and lentils** cook quickly without needing any soaking time.
- **Chicken, turkey, and fish** all freeze well, so stock up on store specials. Be sure to choose *lean* poultry!
- **Veggie burgers** make quick, heart-healthy meals.
- **Canned tuna and salmon** add extra staying power to salads.
- **Nonfat plain yogurt** makes a great topping.
- **Nonfat vanilla yogurt** is perfect as a salad dressing for sweet salads (made with a combination of fruits and veggies) or as a dessert sauce.
- **Fat free or low fat grated cheeses** offer healthful alternatives to full-fat cheese. For best results, only bake or microwave these cheeses briefly – they can become tough when they're cooked for too long.

## Dairy:

- **Whole Milk** for children ages 1-2 years
- **Low Fat (1%) or Nonfat (Skim) Milk** for children over the age of 2 years old.

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