



CLEAN EATING

Getting Started Guide

Learn to Cook & Eat Well



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CLEAN EATING: GETTING STARTED GUIDE

with The Chopping Block's Wellness Chef Alia Dalal

SHAKE THINGS UP THIS YEAR

New Year's comes at the perfect time for Chicagoans: it's usually bitterly cold, snowy and you're just getting the urge to shake things up. This year, when you're planning your New Year's Day Resolutions (or rolling your eyes at your friends who do), consider making a longer-term, sustainable goal when it comes to your health. Instead of hoping to lose 10 pounds, decide to learn to love leafy greens. Instead of cutting out sugar completely and feeling restricted, commit to making balanced lunches for yourself so you don't get sugar-cravings at 3pm in the first place. In short, cultivate a habit of eating well year-round—not just in the first few weeks of January—by learning to prepare simple clean eating-style meals for yourself.

WHAT IS CLEAN EATING?

Now, what is clean eating? To me, it means building my meals around whole plant foods—vegetables, fruits, beans, grains, nuts and seeds. Those foods are the center of my meals and I aim to have them be 80-90% of the food that I eat. Then foods like meat, fish, cheese, processed foods, coffee, alcohol--and my star-crossed lover: bread—are the other 10-20%. Nothing is off-limits, but I like to think of healthful food as an additive process focused on the good ingredients that are in front of me. It's the chef in me!

WHY EAT THIS WAY

Choosing nutrient-dense, whole foods as the core of my diet isn't always easy, especially when I'm busy or stressed. But when I eat well I feel better. I have more creative and physical energy and it boosts my mood, compared to nights when I get takeout or fill up on carb-y snacks. When I eat clean I get sick less and I look better too. As someone who appreciates good food and the people behind it, eating clean in my daily life reminds me to appreciate quality and deeper pleasures.

I think the best thing about cooking good, clean food for myself is that I feel taken care of. When I feel a cold coming on and make myself some gingery miso broth, I'm not sure whether it's the immune boosting properties of the probiotic miso and the anti-inflammatory ginger that make me feel better or just the simple act of taking a moment to nurture myself. Similarly, I love the way I feel when I'm taking care of others. By teaching and cooking, I'm able to unlock the healing and sustaining power of whole foods for my students, friends and family.

So after a festive holiday season, this January, I'm recommitting to eating clean and I hope you'll join me! I put together this packet to give you a head start and a good foundation.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF A CLEAN DIET

This packet is organized around a few clean eating principles:

1. Get good quality protein at each meal, mostly from plant sources.
2. Get fat from whole foods like avocados, coconuts, olives, nuts, seeds—and yes! chocolate!—instead of from fried or processed foods.
3. Aim for at least 2 vegetables at every meal.

YOUR GUIDE + RESOURCES

Enjoy the rest of this packet with my Clean Eating Pantry Staples as well as four everyday recipes to get you started. Then join me for my three-class Clean Eating cooking class series around these same ideas starting in February at the Merchandise Mart: Plant-powered Protein, Filling Fats and Very Vegetable. Each class features a realistic weekday recipe for breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack. You'll learn not only recipes that fit into your busy life, but also the nutritional information behind why you'd want to make these choices and culinary insight about how best to handle the whole food ingredients that might be new to you.

MORE, MORE, MORE

Keep an eye out for more Clean Eating classes throughout the year too. Look for the "Clean Eating" label on The Chopping Block class calendars or [sign up for my newsletter](#) to be alerted directly when new classes are announced.

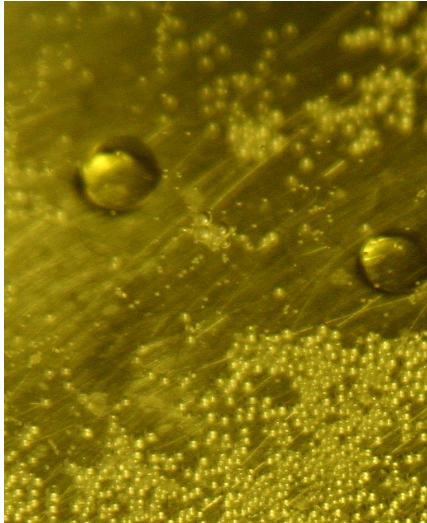
Here's to eating clean!

Hugs, kisses and kale—
Alia

CLEAN EATING PANTRY STAPLES

Here's a sneak peak into my pantry. These are the staples I keep around my kitchen all the time to make sure that healthy meal preparation is always fast and easy.

We go more in depth into the reasoning behind using certain ingredients in the classes, but this list will give you a healthy head start!



QUALITY COOKING OILS

Extra Virgin Olive Oil

-for raw salads and light sautés. Despite what cooking TV shows would have you believe, extra virgin olive oil should not be heated a lot.

Grapeseed Oil

-for high heat cooking, roasting and stir-frying
Coconut Oil—for medium heat and baking

Ghee (Indian clarified butter)

-for medium high heat and a rich buttery taste

IN THE FRIDGE

Lemons

-get added to everything! They wake up the flavor are often the missing ingredient in flat-tasting food.

Scallions

-are my go-to fresh herb because they goes with everything.

Almond Milk

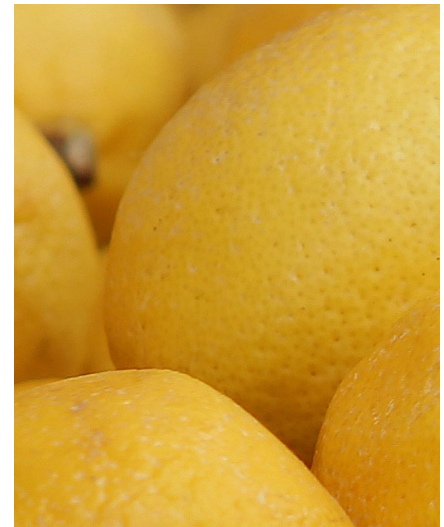
-adds creaminess to smoothies, soups and gets stirred into my coffee.

Bananas

-are the best way to sweeten up and add creaminess to a green smoothie.

Bagged Baby Greens

-make it easy for me to eat greens any day whether in smoothie, sauté or in a salad.



NUTS & SEEDS

Sesame Seeds

-calcium-packed and a fun garnish.

Hemp Seeds

-are my favorite whole-food plant-based protein source. Omega 3s too!

Chia Seeds

-contain lots of Omega 3 Fatty Acids and make a great egg replacer.

Cashews

-are the best nut. End of story.

Walnuts

-have Omega 3s and are a great way to add crunch to salads and raw snacks.



LEGUMES

Black Beans

-are easy to digest and rich in the antioxidant anthocyanins. Great for South American-influenced dishes.

Chickpeas

-are my favorite bean! These are delicious roasted in the oven until crispy.

French Green Lentils

-are fast cooking and can be added to soups, salads and even toast.

White Beans

-get blended into "creamy" soups instead of cream.

Chickpea Flour

-is a high protein flour that makes great crepes, falafel and more.

GRAINS

Quinoa

-is fast cooking and high in protein. I like to keep red, white and black on hand.

Rice Noodles

-are gluten-free yet hold together well and are great in Asian dishes.

Brown Rice

-is the basic B of grains but it's still versatile and fun.



HEALTHY SEASONINGS

Sea Salt

-is more complex and mineral-rich than table salt.

Tamari

-adds umami flavor and saltiness to marinades, dressing, sautés and more.

Nutritional Yeast

-is a great source of vitamin B12 and has a remarkably cheesy flavor.

Smoked Paprika

-adds smokiness to fast cooked dishes without meat or the BBQ.

Cumin

-is one of my most used spices. I love its coolness and smokiness.

Dijon Mustard

-emulsifies dressings and adds zip to sauces

Toasted Sesame Oil

-adds depth and nuttiness to dishes. You just need a dash.

NATURAL SWEETENERS

Maple Syrup

-is my go-to for sweets and baked goods. It's always a secret ingredient in my kale when I need to balance the bitterness.

Dates

-help me sweeten raw snacks and smoothies. They add extra fiber too.

Honey

-is floral and sticky, and great in salad dressings, tea and anything fruit-based.

FERMENTED PRODUCTS

Miso

-adds umami flavor, even to Mediterranean dishes like pesto and minestrone. Add to soup after it's off the heat to preserve its probiotic power.

Kimchi

-is my favorite naturally fermented pickle. It's sharp and spicy and great on top of eggs or any "bowl" meal.

Homemade Coconut Yogurt

-is delicious and rich. Dollop it on to of desserts, breakfasts and stir into Indian dishes.

START YOUR DAY WITH A GOOD BREAKFAST



I love to start my day with some variation of a green smoothie. By blending leafy green vegetables with fruit, you get all the fiber and nutrients of the vegetables but mask the bitterness. If you haven't been getting enough vegetables lately, consider adding a supplement powder like spirulina for an extra green boost. Green smoothies set your tastebuds and attitude for the day when it comes to eating clean. You'll want to keep up the good habit after starting off the day with this guy. And don't skip the lemon. Trust me.

THREE GREENS SMOOTHIE

- 1 banana
- 1 green apple, cored and chopped
- 1/2 cup cucumber
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 cup lacinato kale
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 teaspoon spirulina powder (optional)
- 1 tablespoon hemp seeds (optional)

1. Blend all the ingredients in a high-powered blender with water until smooth. Can store in the fridge for 24 hours.

This veggie-packed recipe is from my [Clean Eating: Very Vegetable class](#) where I show you how to get 2 servings of vegetables into every meal, including breakfast!

I've cooked and meal planned for clients from all walks of life—new moms, grandpas, people with autoimmune disorders, kids, and cancer patients—and the one thing that their doctors always agree on is that more vegetables are key for optimal health. Packed with antioxidants, phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals, vegetables are instrumental in helping all our systems running smoothly. Learn which vegetables you should be eating more of in [Very Vegetable](#).

TAKE A HEALTHY LUNCH TO WORK



When lunchtime rolls around, you want something filling and delicious, yet easily portable if you work in an office or outside of the home. This curried quinoa salad is easy to prep and it's a great base for playing with flavors, seasonings and other ingredients that you may have on hand. Quinoa, beans and nuts all contribute the essential amino acids (protein) our bodies need to build muscle, bone, hair and more.

CURRIED SALAD WITH CARROTS

serves 3-4

- 1 cup quinoa (I like a mix of black and white)
- 1 10 ounce bag of shredded carrots
- 1 15-ounce can aduki beans (can sub black beans)
- 1/2 cup currants
- 3 scallions, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup toasted cashews
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- juice from 1 lemon
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 1 bag of baby spinach or 1 bunch of cilantro, chopped

1. Bring 1 1/2 cups of water up to a boil in a small, covered pot. Add quinoa and salt and cook for 15-20 minutes until all water is absorbed. Remove from heat into a large bowl and let cool.

2. Add the carrots, aduki beans, currants, scallions and cashews to the quinoa. In a small mason jar, combine the curry powder, lemon juice, extra virgin olive oil with plenty of salt and pepper. Shake to combine and toss the quinoa with the dressing until lightly coated. You may have some left over.

3. To pack the lunch to-go, add the shredded spinach or cilantro on top of the quinoa salad in food storage containers. Toss just before serving. Great cold or at room temperature.

This protein-packed recipe is from **Clean Eating: Plant-Powered Protein**.

While fitness gurus would have you believe that we are living in the Age of Too Little Protein, most Americans actually eat far beyond the recommended amount.

Consider substituting plant-sources of protein like beans, whole grains, nuts, seeds and even vegetables to get your protein so that it's combined with nutrients and fiber. Learn which plant foods are highest in protein and why you might want to cut down on animal protein in **Plant-Powered Protein**.

SNACK TIME: THE BEST TIME



A healthy diet should rarely leave you hungry between meals, but of course, life happens! And maybe you're even like me in that you—gasp!—like to eat something sweet just for pleasure sometimes. That's where healthy snacks and sweets come in. A sugary muffin or chips leave you feeling drained and often still hungry, but a whole foods snack made with quality fat will help control your blood sugar and keep you full until your next meal. This play on Reese's Peanut Butter Cups uses sunflower seed butter—high in Vitamin E and Magnesium—and dark chocolate for good fats and rich taste.

DARK CHOCOLATE SUNFLOWER CUPS

1/3 cup sunflower seed butter
1 tablespoon maple syrup
2 teaspoons coconut oil
2 3.5-ounce chocolate bars (70% cocoa)
optional garnish: toasted sunflower seeds and/or flaked sea salt

1. Line a mini muffin tray with 12 paper liners.
2. In a small bowl, whisk sunflower seed butter, maple syrup, and coconut oil together with a fork. Pop the sunflower seed bowl in the freezer to chill.
3. Chop up chocolate bars and melt in the microwave or a double boiler. Fill each paper liner with 1 teaspoon of melted chocolate and tilt the pan to completely cover the bottom and slightly up the sides of each paper liner. Pop into the freezer to harden.
4. Take a heaping 1/2 teaspoon scoop of the sunflower seed mixture and roll into a ball. Place on top of the chocolate and press gently to flatten into a thick disk. You want to leave a very thin circle of chocolate around the peanut butter so that the chocolate will completely encase the filling. Repeat for all muffin cups.
5. Take 1 teaspoon of melted chocolate (or more) and cover each cup completely. Give the pan a little shimmy to flatten the surface of the chocolate. Top each with a pinch of sea salt or sunflower seeds and chill in the fridge. Serve once hardened. Make a bunch of friends fast.

This recipe is from my class
[Clean Eating: Filling Fats.](#)

Fat keeps you full, is essential for good cognitive function and suppresses cravings. In this class we'll talk about which foods are the best sources of healthy fats and show how to get a little in each breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack that you make. Learn which types of fat are the good guys and which ones you might want to avoid in Filling Fats.

GET DINNER ON THE TABLE FAST



We call these Depression Meals in my house: you look at all the leftover, random ingredients in the fridge, toss them into a sauté pan with some good seasonings and call it a bowl full of dinner. While I wouldn't serve this at a dinner party, this style of "food in a bowl" cooking is so key to getting me to eat clean daily instead of just "when I have time." Feel free to sub whatever vegetables and beans you have on hand and try my salty-sweet-tangy seasoning to see what magic you can create.

CAULIFLOWER, KALE & CHICKPEA SAUTE

serves 2-3

1 15-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
 1 2-inch piece of ginger, minced
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 red onion
 1 small head cauliflower, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
 1/2 cup water
 2 tablespoons Tamari
 1 tablespoon maple syrup
 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
 1 bunch lacinato kale, shredded
 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
 salt and lots of black pepper

1. In your largest skillet, drizzle some grapeseed oil and add the chickpeas and some salt. Shake the pan occasionally and cook until the chickpeas start to crisp and brown about 5-10 minutes. Remove to a bowl.

2. In the same skillet, add another drizzle of oil and the red onion, ginger and garlic. Saute until soft and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add the cauliflower and stir. Mix up your sauce in a bowl: water, tamari, maple and Dijon. Add this to the pan and let cook until the cauliflower is cooked through, about 5-10 minutes.

3. Wilt in the kale and taste to add more salt/tamari if necessary. Drizzle with toasted sesame oil and serve. Add any herbs, nuts or seeds you want as a garnish.

This recipe is one of many posted on [my website](#).

Browse the Recipes page for more inspiration and keep an eye on the Classes tab to see when my new classes at The Chopping Block are posted.

Sign up for my newsletter to get an email alert when new classes are posted!



NIX THE SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES: GO FOR FUN INFUSIONS

Eating well can also refer to the beverages that we drink! No one thinks soda is good for you, but I know it can be a hard habit to break if you've been used to your daily Coke or Diet Coke habit for years. The good news is, by skipping soda and other flavored or sweetened beverages like fruit juices, sports drinks, iced teas, and fancy coffee drinks, you can easily make an impactful change in your health. Sugar in liquid form can rapidly spike our blood sugar and diet or artificial sweeteners can disrupt the gut microbiome and is linked to metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions that increases your risk for diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Stick to unsweetened beverages like water, plain coffee and tea, and herbal teas for everyday drinking. Unsweetened doesn't mean boring, as you can see with this vibrantly colored hibiscus infusion, where your refrigerator does all the work.

COLD-BREWED HIBISCUS ICED TEA

Makes 4 cups

Hibiscus flowers can be used to make a tart, floral almost cranberry-like infusion called Jamaica or Agua de Jamaica. High in iron and Vitamin C, you can often find this beverage at your local taqueria. It is also used medicinally in the Middle East and South and Central America and the Caribbean--as with any herbal tea, pregnant women or anyone with allergies or illnesses should consult their doctor before consuming.

1/2 cup dried hibiscus flowers
 4 cups filtered water
 1 cinnamon stick
 1-inch piece of ginger, peeled and sliced
 To serve: orange slices and ice

1. In a quart-size mason jar, add all ingredients and fill to the brim. Put on the lid and shake. Store in the fridge for 4-24 hours. Strain and serve unsweetened with orange slices and ice in a tall glass.

*Note: If this is still too tart for you, try squeezing more fresh orange into it. Can also combined with lemonade, iced tea, club soda, champagne or cocktail ingredients. Have fun!

THANK YOU

Thanks for joining me on this mini clean eating journey!

I hope you'll be inspired to test out these recipes in your kitchen and let me know what you think. If you are hungry for more, be sure to check out my Clean Eating classes at The Chopping Block.

Click here to view The Chopping Block's class calendar.



ALIA DALAL

Wellness Chef + Good Food Seeker

Alia Dalal is a Chicago-based chef with a passion for vibrant, sustainable, and healthy food. After working in Michelin-starred kitchens in New York and Chicago and a destination spa in India, she discovered her calling is inspiring everyday people to engage with food as a way to experience culture, connection, and wellness.

Chef Alia received her formal culinary education at the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts and she teaches public classes and corporate workshops on food and health. She also consults to food brands looking for creative ways to connect with health-conscious consumers and improve their offerings. She founded her independent culinary business in 2011 and began her career working in restaurants 13 years ago.

Her own multicultural background leads her to advocate for quality food access for all which she does by volunteering for organizations that bring healthy food education to city public schools. And because good food should be FUN, she also hosts a bar show on the good food and beverage scene in Chicago called Nightcap where she's interviewed everyone from award-winning chefs to a cookie-loving brick of cheese named Cookie Muenster.

Alia also teaches in-home, one-on-one cooking classes and offers meal-planning and nutrition coaching services to clients.

Have a question for her or want to work with Chef Alia? Reach her via email at aliadalal@gmail.com or [via her website at aliadalal.com](http://viaherwebsite.com).



ALIA DALAL
WELLNESS CHEF



THE CHOPPING BLOCK

Chicago's Recreational Cooking School

The Chopping Block is a leader in the culinary industry for its mission to get people to cook. The popular recreational cooking school, private event venue and gourmet retail and wine store has been in business for over 19 years in Chicago due to its ability to adapt to its customers' needs. A highly-trained staff interacts with customers like they would with their own families: they swap stories, share recipes and learn together. The Chopping Block modifies what they teach, how they teach and what products they offer to fit the ever-changing needs of their students. From 101 cooking classes to professional culinary school-style instruction in Culinary Boot Camps, The Chopping Block addresses deficiencies in cooking skills for all levels.

Learn more about The Chopping Block at our [website at thechoppingblock.com](http://thechoppingblock.com). Got questions? Call us at 312-644-6360 (Merchandise Mart) or 773-472-6700 (Lincoln Square) or email info@thechoppingblock.com.

Happy cooking!

