

#107 - Food in a Bowl: Basics

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today we're starting a three-part series that I'm so excited about - Food in a Bowl! My family eats so much food in a bowl from pasta and soup to the obvious cereal and ice cream, but for this series, I'm talking more about dinner bowls, meals that are made up of multiple components layered together, not necessarily soup. If you want to know how to make soup, I have an episode for that. It's called, wait for it, The Lazy Genius Makes Soup, and I'll be sure to have a link in the shownotes, or you can scroll down in your podcast app to episode #54 to listen.

For today, we want to learn how to put together a delicious meal that is made up of lots of ingredients that happen to make friends in a bowl. There's something about eating food out of a bowl, especially beautiful food, that is so comforting and lovely, even in the warm weather that's heading our way. So in this first episode, we're going to talk about the basic building blocks of a dinner bowl. Next week in part two, we'll talk about actual flavor combinations, and in part three, we'll talk all kinds of hacks and how-to's to make dinner bowls feel like one of your easier dinner options rather than one of the most complicated.

Before we jump into the basics, I want to give a quick heads up about something cool. We all want better, more creative, more sane ways to keep our homes which is probably one of the reasons you listen to this podcast. Well, right now for just a couple more days, The Ultimate Homemaking Bundle is available! If you've never heard of Ultimate Bundles, it's a fantastic, almost magical situation where this company Ultimate Bundles gathers up the best of the best in terms of online courses, printables, and ebooks from all over the Internet and bundles them together for you to get for one low price. The Ultimate Homemaking Bundle closes May 6, and it has almost \$3000 worth of resources to help you clean better, organize better, all kinds of home things better. And it's \$30. For real. Three grand for thirty bucks. And here's the great news: The Swap is in this year's bundle! I have an ebook called The Swap: The Lazy Genius Guide to Decluttering for Life, and buying this bundle is the only way to get The Swap for at least another six months. I was tired of fashioning together some kind of decluttering process from lots of different voices, so I made my own and it's already helped a lot of you. If you haven't yet purchased The Swap, getting it as part of The Ultimate Homemaking Bundle is a great move. It's such an amazing resource with all kinds of things to make your homemaking experience an easier, prettier one, so if you're interested in checking it out and getting The Swap, there's a link in the info for this episode on your podcast app and also in the show notes for this episode at thelazygeniuscollective.com/lazy/bowlone. That's the number one spelled out, all lowercase. The bundle goes away on May 6th, so be sure to check it out before it's gone. And my beloved Nester has this great resource on getting ready for summer that I have used and absolutely love. Be sure to check that link to learn more!

Okay, the basics of food in a bowl!

Here's your one rule and the most important thing about making dinner bowls. You must have contrast. Contrast moves a dinner bowl from fine to a delight. Contrasting temperatures - hot and cold; contrasting textures - creamy, crunchy, meaty, and crispy; and contrasting flavors - sweet, salty, spicy, tangy, bright, neutral. You might feel a little overwhelmed about putting

together some crazy contrasting dinner bowl from scratch, but don't worry. We'll get to the building in just a second.

I think that dinner bowls are one of the easiest, prettiest, tastiest meals out there, but I hear the opposite from many of you. You're super intimidated by dinner bowls, mostly because there are so many options and you might mess it up and it feels like so much work and all the things. Here's your homework for this episode: make a dinner bowl this week from what you already have. Build a bowl from ingredients and cooking skills you already have. It doesn't have to be seventeen ingredients and super complicated. We're going to build simply and build well.

To build a bowl, you need four main building blocks - the base (usually some kind of grain), protein, toppings, and sauce. You could say a fifth component could be vegetables, but those can show up as part of the base, mixed in with the protein, or in the toppings. They'll be a sub category that we'll get to. But if you have these four components, you have dinner in a bowl.

And here's the natural thing that often happens as you build a bowl with these four components - you get natural contrast. It truly happens without a lot of thoughts as long as you have those four building blocks. I'll show you with a super easy dinner bowl - a basic burrito bowl. We'll pretend we're at Chipotle. You have a base of white rice, your protein is black beans and shredded chicken, your toppings are avocado and crushed up tortilla chips, and your sauce is salsa from a jar. Super basic and also delicious. Let's look at the contrast that simplicity offers. You have both hot and cold - hot rice and meat and beans, and then cold or more or less room temperature stuff with the avocado, salsa, and chips. Texture - carb-y rice with a texture I don't know how to describe but you know what I mean, creamy but meaty beans with a bite, tender chicken, smooth salsa, creamy avocado, and crunchy chips. And flavor - the rice is neutral, maybe the beans and meat are a little spicy, the salsa is spicy but fresh tasting, the avocado is mild and cooling, and the chips are salty. You're getting a really nice dinner bowl from pretty basic ingredients. Now if you just had rice and beans with salsa on top, it would be delicious, but it's not quite the same experience. There's not a lot of textural contrast, but when you add that creamy avocado and the crunchy chips, the contrast elevates it. You're adding a punch that makes the bowl a more pleasant experience to eat and to look at.

So your singular rule for dinner bowls is contrast, and your building blocks to put together that contrast are a base, a protein, toppings, and a sauce.

Let's look at some options for those because sometimes we don't know what to consider until someone tells us it's okay.

We'll start with the base. The obvious options are rice - white, brown, and wild; other grains like quinoa, barley, and farro; noodles - regular pasta, soba noodles, udon noodles, any kind of Asian noodle, even packs of ramen; mashed and creamy things like polenta, mashed potatoes, or mashed sweet potatoes. If you're grain-free, you could do things like tofu, cauliflower couscous, spaghetti squash, cabbage, or roasted vegetables. Your base doesn't have to be bland, but it's often an easy, neutral backdrop for just about anything else you want to put on it. If you use roasted vegetables that are heavily spiced as your base, your toppings and some other stuff might need to be a little more mild to keep the contrast alive.

I'm guessing a lot of you feel like, ugh rice it's always rice, but 90 percent of our family dinner bowls are rice. Truly. There are so many ways you can take rice, so don't feel like you're being

boring if you mostly use rice. Just because you can use an ingredient doesn't mean you have to or that you have to change up the base every single ding dang time. Just build with rice or whatever base makes the most sense for you and get the hang of building bowls with that base before you feel the pressure to move on to every other option. Start small, you guys. Use what ingredients you already like and already know how to make. Start where you are. Don't overcomplicate it.

Next, protein. There are the obvious things like animals and fish. We mostly know what protein is. You also have beans and lentils, tofu and eggs. The thing with dinner bowls is you want everything to be mostly bite-sized, so if you're dealing with meat, you want it to already be bite-sized in the bowl. Don't take a roasted chicken thigh and stick it on top of the bowl. One utensil only guys; dinner bowls shouldn't need knives. So ground meat, meat cooked in a crockpot and shredded, meat that's grilled or sautéed and sliced or chopped, that kind of thing. My favorite protein for a dinner bowl is ground beef just because it's easy and not super expensive and can go so many directions. If you keep your seasoning really simple with just salt and pepper, you can alter your flavors on the toppings and sauce and make a ton of different bowls. I'll give you a couple of options at the end to help you think through your dinner bowl this week. Just remember that whatever you do for your protein, don't forget about contrast as you build the rest of your bowl.

Dinner bowls are the perfect place to use leftover meats from other meals. Grab an extra piece of change your life chicken and shred it up to put on a bowl. If you have taco night and have some extra taco meat, use that. Maybe you buy a rotisserie chicken for enchiladas and have a couple handfuls of chicken left. Perfect for dinner bowls. It's so easy to stretch your protein with this kind of meal, so it's a great way to have great ingredients without spending a lot. Instead of grilling four steaks for four people, grill one, slice it up, and make steak bowls. You get great steak but spent ten bucks instead of forty.

Let's move on to toppings. So many options, you guys. Leftover cooked vegetables, fresh vegetables you chop quickly, a quick slaw, pickled vegetables, herbs, nuts, avocado, whatever. Again, think about how to build contrast as you build your bowl; toppings are a brilliant way to amp up a bowl in big ways. If you need a visual, just imagine a salad bar. Anything you see on a salad bar would be a great topping for a dinner bowl. Toppings are also your best place to add cold, fresh, bright flavors and textures. Because anything is an option, it's hard to go into detail right now because it's all kind of detail. As you start building your dinner bowl this week, just keep it simple. Maybe limit yourself to two toppings to keep the pressure low. Again, just because you can use something doesn't mean you have to. Start small.

Finally, sauce. Sauce is where a bowl of food really becomes a dinner bowl. I get a lot of questions about sauce because I think you guys know the importance of the sauce. Yes, it's important, but it can also be simple. Salsa is a sauce. Salad dressing from a bottle is a sauce. You think you need to be Antoni from Queer Eye and whip up all these sauces on a whim, but the grocery store has bottles of great stuff. I use Yum Yum sauce from the store almost always. It's literally called Yum Yum sauce, and you can get it at Target and all the places. It's sweet and creamy and brings everything together. I also will sometimes do a drizzle of sriracha alongside it to add some spice. A bottle of red salsa, green salsa, hot sauce, any kind of dipping sauce, sour cream thinned with lime juice or just dolloped on top. Even the runny yolk from a fried egg is like a sauce. You're likely overthinking it. There are definitely fun recipes out there for sauces, but I'm still in the "use what I have and know" phase of making dinner bowls myself, mostly

because I'm not in a place to spend a lot of extra brain power on trying a bunch of homemade sauces. But the Internet is full of homemade sauces. Which is part of the problem, but you don't have to make all of them. Just try one! Start small. The internet isn't going anywhere.

Which leads me to this: you don't have to know how to make every possible dinner bowl in order to make one good one. Just start with one. Start as simply as you can with what you already have and know. Get used to the process and experience of making and eating a dinner bowl before you feel like you have to know how to make ten different sauces from scratch and pickle your own onions and all the things. You really just need to have one or two options and start building simply. So rather than make a sauce for your dinner bowl this week, use what you have. See how delightful barbecue sauce or salsa can be on your bowl. You can expand your options as you learn what you like and go from there.

So as we wrap up this first episode on food in a bowl, let's build a few dinner bowls using rice as a base and ground beef as the protein, and you'll see how varied the options can be just from using different toppings and sauces. So we're starting with plain white rice and ground beef seasoned with salt and black pepper. About as basic as you can get.

Option one: toppings are avocado and corn cut off the cob, and your sauce is a spicy salsa. You get crunchy, creamy, sweet, spicy, great textures. So yummy.

Option two: toppings are diced cucumber and pickled ginger from the jar which is one of my dinner bowl secret weapons, and your sauce is yum yum sauce. So you get a bright crunchy freshness from the cucumber, a spicy bite and some pretty color from the pickled ginger, and a cream mild sweetness to bring it all together.

Option three: toppings are sautéed diced onions and peppers and chopped peanuts and your sauce is a carrot-ginger dressing from a bottle, like the kind you get at the Japanese steakhouses. Crispy, crunchy, spicy, tangy, and sweet.

Option four: toppings are roasted sweet potatoes and black beans from a can, and your sauce is bottled barbecue sauce. Finish with a little cilantro or a squeeze of lime to add some freshness and brightness on that one.

Option five: toppings are diced cherry tomatoes and black olives, and your sauce is legit pasta sauce from a jar. It's like a pizza bowl. Even sprinkle Parmesan on top.

You see how it doesn't have to be super complicated? Two toppings and a sauce on rice and meat. Done. So many possibilities just there.

The beauty of this way of eating dinner is that everyone can customize how they want, but you don't have to have every option under the sun for it to work. Simple is usually better. A lot of you have asked about doing with this with picky kids who don't like their food to touch; we'll talk about that in part three for sure, so hang tight.

I'm going to stop for today since we have two more weeks to drill down into other aspects of food in a bowl, but this week, make a dinner bowl. Remember that contrast is king, and you can create contrast in lots of ways using any of the four building blocks of bowls - a base, your protein, toppings, and sauce. This week, use what you already have and make what you already know. Just layer it and put it in a bowl. If you're worried about it being a hard sell for a family dinner, start with your own personal lunch. Make an extra half cup of rice at dinner, save a little chicken from your tortilla soup, and build a bowl. You can absolutely do this. If you haven't yet, it's likely because your expectations are too high and you think you need to know

every option to make just one bowl. You do not. You can do this and are far more likely to do this once and many times after by starting simply with what you have now and already know today.

That's it for today, you guys! I'm so excited about this series, so next week we'll talk about cuisines and flavor combos more specifically, and our third and final week will be hacks and how-to's to make dinner bowls become an easier, more regular part of your meals.

Don't forget about The Ultimate Homemaking Bundle! It goes away on May 6th, so don't miss out on my decluttering ebook The Swap and \$3000 worth of amazing homemaking resources for just thirty bucks. Link is in the show notes.

Thanks for listening, you guys! I'm so grateful for you! Join me this Thursday on Instagram @thelazygenius between 12pm and 12:15pm EST to ask me your questions about food in a bowl, so I'll see you then and again next Monday with our next episode. Until then, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next time.