

# #104 - The Lazy Genius Makes Pizza Part 1

Hey, guys! 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 is a highly anticipated episode - #104 The Lazy Genius Makes Pizza. It's here! And there's so much to say that this is part one. Next week we'll do a little more. If you follow me on Instagram @thelazygenius, you've probably seen my weekly meal plans, and almost every Friday, it says Pizza Friday. And anytime it says Pizza Friday, I get a ton of DMs asking for my favorite pizza recipe. I actually did a story once where I put up that question box and asked for your questions about pizza, and there were so many. I answered some on Instagram, and you can see those in my Pizza Highlight which are those circles on my profile page above all my photos, but I'm going to answer some of them in this episode, too. Today we're focusing on dough - the science of dough, how to make it, how to cheat it, and how to plan out the timing. Next week we'll talk about sauce and toppings and cooking techniques and everything else.

But first, a word. Ninety percent of the time, we have pizza on Fridays, and it's almost always homemade just because I love it. If I didn't love it, we wouldn't do it. That rule should exist for you, too. If you don't love making homemade pizza, don't do it. Or maybe you have people in your family that love eating homemade pizza which is why you make it. In that case, you're doing something kind and loving to your people by doing something you don't love in order to bring them some joy, so hopefully in this episode there are some tips that can help make the experience better if you choose to continue having it.

Now let's talk about dough. I'm certainly not an expert in making pizza, but I've made it dozens and dozens of times. Anything you do a lot puts you at some level of expertise, but I'll always be learning and always have questions. Luckily, I have a friend who makes pizza more often than I do, so I'll usually ask him my questions and I hope I be that for you. Because here's the thing: making pizza dough has a lot of nuance. The most common question I get about pizza is what's your favorite dough recipe, and to me, it feels like an impossible question. In fact, when I went through the questions left on Instagram, some of you asked how to get a crispy crust that wasn't chewy, some wanted a chewy crust, others wanted a thicker, dough-y crust. The only thing that was fairly uniform across the board was wanting dough that doesn't take all day. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but dough by its very nature takes awhile. And the amount of time it takes in combination with the ratio of ingredients affects the texture and timing of the pizza itself. Pizza itself isn't super categorical because no single dough recipe is going to satisfy every pizza eater. So our first step in making dough is recognizing those expectations. It could be that you're expecting too much. You want healthy pizza that tastes like the real thing. You want delicious, flavorful dough that doesn't have to rise. You want the experience of making pizza, but you don't want it to take too long. Maybe you're waiting for a pizza unicorn and need to let it go. I get it. We do this a lot with food and even with other stuff. I wrote a post awhile back called *When Your Meal Plan Has House Hunters Syndrome*. You've watched *House Hunters*, right? The couple wants at least four bedrooms, three baths, an open concept living area, a big kitchen for entertaining, a two car garage, and a yard. But their budget is twelve dollars. We have to make concessions in places. When it comes to pizza, you can't have a completely start to finish homemade pizza without investing some time. There are definite shortcuts that we'll talk about, but you have to expect several hours of time if not way more. It's very little hands on, but you do have to plan ahead a little. Which you can do, and again we'll talk about as many time saving tips as I can in this episode and the one next week.

So let's talk about three kinds of pizza you might be looking for. There are so many styles of dough, but knowing what you want will help you know what to look for. Those three kinds are Neapolitan, New York, and Sicilian which is kind of like deep dish. Neapolitan pizza is crispy, thin, the crust is charred, and it's got a really good chew. You have to really use your teeth. Neapolitan dough is the kind you see in those crazy hot pizza ovens for like three minutes where they puff and get black in places and it's magical. So that's the first style. The second style is New York style. New York style crust isn't crispy, it's a little doughy, and super tender. New York style pizza is the kind that you have to fold because the crust just isn't going to hold up to your holding it flat. And the third kind is Sicilian or deep dish. It's thick, soft, usually super crunchy on the outside, and kind of fatty. Knowing which kind of pizza you prefer will really help you as we talk about doughs, especially because the length of time these three doughs need to rise and ferment is pretty different.

Let's start with Neapolitan. A Neapolitan dough is called a lean dough which means it doesn't have any sugar or fat in it. It's the most basic recipe you can get - flour, yeast, salt and water. None of those things have a lot of flavor until they're allowed to hang out and become friends for a long time, also known as the fermentation period. Neapolitan dough need a long rise, usually in the fridge, for 24-72 hours, and in that time, the flour hydrates, the gluten develops, and the dough kind of ages giving it a really good flavor. A couple of important things to remember about this style of dough - first, it doesn't really get kneaded. If kneading dough weirds you out or feels like too much work, this could be a fantastic style of dough for you to try. The purpose of kneading is to develop the gluten in a dough or the structure. The more the gluten is developed, the stronger the structure and the chewier or crispier the end result. This is why if you were to mix a muffin batter within an inch of its life, your muffins would be tough as rocks because you developed the gluten and thus the structure way too much. But pizza dough, especially Neapolitan pizza dough which by definition is supposed to be really chewy and sturdy, needs a lot of gluten development. You don't get it by kneading forever; you get it by letting it hang out and ferment and get tasty. And because it's a lean dough and doesn't have fat or sugar, it's not as tender. Fat and sugar make things tender. That's why cakes and cookies have such delicate structures; the ratio of flour to the tenderizing fats and sugars is super high compared to pizza dough or a sourdough loaf. So to recap Neapolitan, it's a basic recipe with only four ingredients, one of which is water, it doesn't require much kneading, but it does require time, at least a full day, and the resulting texture is crispy, chewy, and charred. You do have to cook it at the highest temperature you can, but we'll talk about the actual baking process in the next episode.

The second style of dough is New York style. Not super crisp, a bit thicker, and probably the most common dough you get at pizza takeout places. Just middle of the road. Now, there's a difference in good New York style pizza dough and Papa John's, but in terms of your expectations, that "regular" style is what you're going for. Now we already talked about what makes doughs tender, right? Fat and sugar. Since this dough definitely has a softer texture and less crispy crust, it has fat and sugar in it. It's also a kneaded dough which means the gluten can develop faster than a slow rise like the Neapolitan. You also get more flavor and don't need as many hours to develop the flavor of the dough because of the fat and sugar; they help with the flavor so that you don't need to take so much time. Most New York style doughs are meant to be cooked the day you make them. So to recap this one, it's chewy, not crispy so kind of your middle of the road pizza dough, it has to be kneaded, it doesn't need as much time to rise, maybe a couple of hours, and it needs to be cooked the same day for the most part.

And the third kind of Sicilian. It's thick and crispy on the bottom. Kind of like pan pizza expect traditionally Sicilian pizza is cooked as a square. You make a really not lean dough - this dough has definite fat and sugar in it - and it has a higher ratio of water to flour so it's really sticky and loose. You put that dough on a baking sheet that's covered in olive oil and then bake the pizza,

and the crust is doughy and thick but on the bottom is basically fried so it's really crunchy. Pizza Hut pan pizza is the closest mainstream example of the texture I'm talking about, just way better even though I love a pan supreme from Pizza Hut.

In terms of beginning with dough, Sicilian is actually your best place to start. It's the least traditional in that it's not even a circle usually and it might not fit your expectations of what it means for you to make homemade pizza because it is a much easier dough to make, it's really user friendly and forgiving unlike Neapolitan dough, and that might be a beautiful message to hear, that you can get some form of homemade pizza that doesn't take forever or it might bum you out because you're realizing that you have Neapolitan expectations with only Sicilian time. And that's why when you guys ask me for my favorite basic dough recipe, there just isn't one. Pizza is too different. Dough has so many personalities by only changing the ratio of ingredients and adding maybe olive oil and sugar to the already very basic flour, salt, water, and yeast. But knowing what you're after and what you're willing to compromise one is super important.

Here's a little story. So my friend, Michael, who makes pizza more often than I do and is better at it than I am, had the idea over a year ago to have a big pizza dough taste test. We both nerd out over the difference in doughs and only bake from cookbooks that only focused on pizza. We both are trying to learn from pizza masters and understand how the dough really works. So he and I made a couple of different doughs each to be able compare the difference side by side. He made a Neapolitan dough (that's the really lean one that takes a long time) and another dough made with something called a poolish which is basically like a bread starter which gives it a ton of fermented flavor, and then I made a more New York style dough from a pizza book I'd just gotten and I made the dough that I've always made my family up until that point - the pioneer woman's pizza dough. Now hear me. A lot of you love that recipe; we did too for a long time. But when you taste pizza next to other kinds of pizza and get to compare right away, you'll be shocked. The same thing happened awhile back when I did a chocolate chip cookie tasting. I made nine different recipes or maybe it was twelve and invited a ton of people over to try cookies. Cookies that tasted great on their own just as chocolate chip cookies were shockingly gross next to supremely better tasting cookies. But you wouldn't know that on their own. That's what happened to me with pizza dough that night. Michael's dough was shockingly more delicious to the point where I became such a student of pizza dough and saw the difference in doughs that are fermented for a couple of days versus doughs that rise for just an hour versus doughs that have hardly any salt in them or so much oil or none at all or any of it. It was kind of intense if you could't tell.

Now you might be like "Kendra ohmygosh I don't care as much as you do just give me a recipe," I will. And if you find one or already have one that's good enough and you like just fine, stick with it. Don't fix it if ain't broke. But you're not missing out on some magical pizza dough recipe that everyone else seems to know and use and you're just making mediocre pizza at home. There isn't a master recipe because pizza is just too different.

I will put some recipes for sure in the show notes labeled very clearly for what they are and what you'll get out of them. But I get the sense from so many of your questions that you really want a delicious pizza experience and aren't satisfied with what you have now. Understanding something as silly as pizza dough can actually help direct you in creating your own homemade pizza night that fits not just your schedule but your expectations of the process, of the flavor, of the texture, of the ease. And here's the ironic little formula. Almost always, the doughs that are the least hands on and the easiest in the sense of not having to babysit the dough or knead it a lot or bloom the yeast in water are the ones that have to sit for a day or three. The quicker you want your day, the more attention you have to give it. You have to knead it to get the gluten developed. You have to add more ingredients to get the flavor that you're losing by not fermenting. And you're almost certainly not going to get a super thin, crispy crust because that

dough needs so much gluten development and no fat. Otherwise it tears. So that's why I say all these words about expectations. I sensed a great mood of discontentment in those pizza questions. You guys are really frustrated that this isn't easier, but I think it's because you don't know what to focus on and what processes lead to what doughs.

Again, I'll put some recommended recipe links in the show notes, but let's talk a bit more about some other stuff that can help inform how you make dough.

First, the more hydrated the dough or the more water there is, the easier the dough will stretch generally. But here's what happens; we get really scared of wet, sticky doughs. You think it has to be dry and not stick to your hands, so you add more flour as you knead. All that does is make your pizza tough. The ratios in dough are really specific and particular because even an extra tablespoon of water changes things. It changes the texture. So a lot of you were sharing your complaints about having tough dough. I'm guessing it's because there's too much flour, possibly because the wet dough is freaking you out and you keep adding more to make the dough ball smooth. Don't do that. Use a bench scraper to move around the dough, oil your counter instead of flouring it because the little bit of fat will have way less impact than a lot of extra flour. Also your dough could be tough because of how you measure your flour. This is where I tell you to invest in a digital kitchen scale. I love my scale. So much. Dough is so simple, and the same two people could measure out two cups of flour and be off of each other's measurements by like an ounce. Which is a lot. So I use a scale when I bake to be precise. With some baking, it's more forgiving, but with pizza, you'll benefit from the difference since there are so few ingredients to play around with. So don't add flour to knead to get the ball super dry, and consider measuring with a scale instead of a measuring cup so that your amount of flour is on point.

What about the type of flour? We're going to stick with all purpose and bread flour in this little conversation because they're the most accessible. You can buy 00 flour online, but let's just stay with these two familiar options. Bread flour has more gluten in it, so it's going to give you more structure. I always use bread flour for my pizza because it's a leg up. If you use all purpose flour, you'll be okay. Nothing's going to burst into flames, but just know that the structure of your dough is at a disadvantage if you want it to be really sturdy because all purpose flour isn't a strong flour. You know when you watch the great British baking show and Paul talks about strong flour? He means bread flour. It's literally stronger than all purpose flour. I highly recommend keeping some in your pantry so you'll have a better chance to get the dough you're after when you make homemade pizza.

Let's also touch on mixing dough. It's different depending on the recipe. Some recipes you just dump in everything. Some you have to put the yeast in warm water and let it bloom. Let's park here for a second. Blooming is essentially hydrating the yeast. It's waking it up kind of aggressively, like literally throwing water in its face to wake it up. In terms of temperature, it needs to be warm enough for a bath but not really a bath you'd want to take. It's warm but not inviting. It's lukewarm. I use a digital probe thermometer to check the temperature because you want it around 100 degrees, but that temperature is just a little warm. It's not a temperature you'd want to soak in. And when you're waiting for yeast to activate and bloom, don't look for bubbles. It's more like gentle beach foam, not a crazy science experiment. Now if the yeast part is the thing that freaks you out the most, choose a recipe where the yeast doesn't have to bloom. You just dump it in. Generally speaking, active yeast has to be bloomed because otherwise it's hard to wake it up. It's like a hungover teenager. It's basically hopeless. Instant yeast or rapid rise yeast is easier to wake up, so it's the kind of yeast usually in recipes where you can dump everything and stir. The yeast will wake up along with everything else. And you can't just substitute active for instant or the other way around. I mean, you can, but the results won't be ideal. Active yeast has oddly a higher quantity of inactive yeast cells than instant, so you always will need more active than instant if you're substituting, about 25% more. And the

active has to be bloomed first usually. And yeast is scary too because it's literally alive. It's a living organism, so you can kill it. You kill it by putting it in water that's too hot, like a bath you'd want to get into, by putting it in direct contact with salt. Salt and yeast need a mediator. They are not good communicators with each other on their own. And yeast might be dead. Check the expiration date on your package because yeast, like all living things, dies. That got really dark and philosophical, but it's true. So that's a little primer on yeast.

And back to the mixing, depending on the type of pizza dough and the kind of yeast it uses, the mixing is going to vary across the board. You could mix it until it's just combined and then let it sit forever. You could mix it with a dough hook or even mixer paddle attachment. You might have to mix it more by kneading it. There are so many ways. There's definitely not just one way, and not one way works for every recipe for reasons we've already said. It really is science. Fun, delicious science.

Now let's talk about freezing the dough. You can absolutely freeze pizza dough, and it's fantastic. Almost certainly in any recipe you make, go through the entire process until you're ready to make the pizza, and freeze then. Let it ferment and complete its rises and all of that, and then wrap it up. I have used plastic wrap and plastic ziplock bags. Both are fine. Right now, I have six balls of dough in my freezer. Each ball is in a smaller ziplock, and then all the six small bags are in a big freezer bag to protect from freezer burn but to also keep them together. To thaw them, put them in a sink of water. They need to be completely thawed because you try and stretch and shape them. In fact, cold dough is harder to shape than room temperature dough because the dough is stingy and stiff. Cold temperatures make it mean and stubborn. So let's warm it up a little on your counter an hour or so before you want to make it.

Next week, we're going to talk about getting the pizza on and off the pan, what makes to use, what cheese to use, what sauce and topping options you have, and some timesavers, too. But let's wrap up with one quick timesaver as it relates to dough. If you want pizza right now, don't try and find a right now dough recipe. It's not a thing. Your pizza will be gross. But you have a couple of options. Buy dough already made from a grocery store or even a local pizza place. Most places will absolutely sell you a ball of dough. Then just take it home and make pizza. Done. Another quick option is using flatbread or naan. It won't have the same flavor or texture, but you'll get something adjacent to pizza in less than twenty minutes. We make naan pizza often. I buy the big packs at Costco and they're great. It's a different experience but it sure it fast.

So that was a lot of words about dough, but I hope you see now why I can't just answer what's your favorite basic recipe. It's just not a thing, not because I'm a weirdo - I mean, I am, even about pizza - but the actual science behind creating a dough structure doesn't support a crispy, chewy, thick, thin, flavorful, ready in an hour dough recipe. I wish it did. Actually you know what? I don't. And this is a great way to close. I have grown to love the process of making homemade pizza. I think about what kind we want this week and might make a dough two days before. I might try a new one now that I understand the basics of how the ingredients work together. I use the Magic Question a lot for Pizza Friday - what can I do now to make dinner easier later? - so I'll make a sauce the day before, pull out some extra browned sausage from a pasta dinner to put on top of pizzas later. I grate up the cheese and put it in a bag; we'll talk about cheese next week. And I love that we can only cook one pizza at a time, even when people are over. I like that it's slow and fun and an experience. If I had a magic pizza dough recipe, I'd lose all that, and I don't want to. So naming what you want out of your own pizza night is important. I think we've probably said enough today.

Check the show notes for some dough recipes, and next week we'll nail down some other stuff. I appreciate you listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and we'll talk more pizza next week.