

Why Millennials Should Learn to Cook

Why do so few Millennials know how to cook? I think we are seeing basic cooking skills—knowledge that used to be passed in the kitchen from parent to child—combust before our eyes. It's been going on for a while and is part of a larger trend toward relying on processed foods that began in the early 1960s when our grandmothers began preparing more convenient, quick, and easy meals for our parents. This is when the art of cooking slowly began to decline. I hate that phrase—the art of cooking—but it's still relevant.

Michael Pollan delves into these trends in his new Netflix [docu-series](#), *Cooked*. Corporations use the cheapest possible ingredients to sell you processed food—think Spam, canned soup, and fruit cocktail—as well as hyper processed food—TV dinners and prepackaged meals. They aligned their interests with women's, using taglines like “mom's night off” and “you deserve a break today” to sell their products. And it worked.

But I was taken aback by [an article](#) that appeared a few weeks ago in the *New York Times*. The author describes a survey conducted last year by Mintel, a global market research firm. The results show that about 40 percent of Millennials don't eat cereal for breakfast because they have to clean up after eating it.

I find myself feeling the same way. We have packaged grains and pasteurized milk processed for pouring. But we are still dealing with inconvenience. Why pour cereal when it's so easy to grab a breakfast bar or piece of fruit on the go? Even peeling fruit is evidently an insurmountable obstacle for some consumers, so Whole Foods [sold](#) them pre-peeled and packaged in plastic containers (although public outcry about waste

eventually led them to pull the product from shelves). It's all part of a broader mindset that elevates convenience: We want to eat something that's easy, fast, and healthy. The oranges meet that demand, but does this also mean we have no interest in making an effort when it comes to what we eat?

A short summary of the timeline of how our eating habits have evolved over the past half century might look like this: We used to cook; then we "prepared" convenience foods; now we just grab and go. If trends continue, as they often do, and the act of preparing food becomes obsolete, we cannot expect the art of cooking to continue, too. Cooking has become an outsourced art left to professionals on television rather than a necessary skill used by working professionals in their own kitchens. This is a problem.

As Michael Pollan explains on his show, cooking is primal. It's instinctive, passed down for generations among communities all around the world. For that reason, sharing family recipes with others brings comfort; it's personal—and yes, it does create and prompt memories. Smell is the most memorable of the senses. After watching *Cooked*, a dear friend of mine and I baked a peach pie—his grandma's recipe—and it reminded me of summer family gatherings in Chicago. My aunt makes the best peach pie.

The act of cooking is also relaxing. It takes time to become comfortable, to find a routine in the kitchen, and to stop being intimidated by the challenges of cooking, but as a chef on *Cooked* described, doing that with food—even peeling peaches and dusting them with sugar—is an important and soothing human ritual.

Cooking your own food is also healthy, which should appeal to Millennials. As a recent [Goldman Sachs study](#) showed, even with expanded fast food and prepared food options, Millennials are exercising more and eating smarter compared to previous generations. We are health-conscious. So if you care about

your health—both your physical body and mental wellbeing—you should learn how to cook.

Food expert Harry Balzer put it best on an episode of *Cooked*: “Eat anything you want. . . . I’m just going to ask you to do one thing. Make all of it. Make all the apple pie. Make the ice cream. Make the cookies. You know what I know is going to happen? You’re not having apple pie, ice cream, or cookies tonight.”

I’m not saying you have to bake your own loaf of bread. No one does that. I am saying that it’s worth being aware of what you are buying—for your brain and your body. The correlation is clear: as cooking rates drop, obesity rates rise. Packing on the pounds is bad for your brain. So not only are we getting fat, we’re getting stupid.

Cooking or preparing meals can be hard to do. I get it. Premade replacements save time. In fact I’m eating a prepackaged salad as I write this article. But I’m inspired to continue learning, taking classes, and understanding how to prepare wholesome meals. Nothing can replace a home-cooked meal, even if you’re only making it for yourself. While a hearty prepackaged meal can be filling, a meal cooked at home is fulfilling.

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