

There remains an intense debate among foodies over whether dining out or dining in leads to better meals. But better is a loaded statement. Better can mean better tasting. Better can mean better satisfying. Better can mean better options. Or perhaps, better means better for you. While many food critics will state that, yes, dining out is less healthy than dining in, the truth is that the reality is overwhelmingly in favour of dining in.

We love our restaurants. Studies indicate that Canadians eat about 24 percent, almost one quarter of their meals away from home. Restaurant food is meant to look, smell and taste great, and that means nutrition can sometimes fall by the wayside as menus feature main dishes drenched in butter or rich sauces, salads with creamy dressings, and few whole grains, fruits and vegetables. When you eat out, you hardly know the nutritional value of the dish, but when you cook at home you know the quantity and quality of the ingredients. So, in every way, the homemade food is balanced and healthy as compared to the restaurant or packaged food. If you want to know where your food comes from, eating out makes it even harder for you to access that information. By cooking your own meal, you can ensure that the ingredients you're eating are fresh, locally sourced and sustainably farmed.

If you grew up sharing stories and catching up with family around the dinner table, you understand the value of bonding over a good homemade meal. For some families, dinner time may be the only shared experience in a day. Children benefit greatly from learning how to cook and prepare food at an early age. Adults also reap considerable benefits from eating home-cooked meals. According to psychologists, cooking is also a therapy that reduces stress and provides relaxation after a stressful day out. Research also finds that people who eat home-cooked meals on a regular basis tend to be happier and healthier and consume less sugar and processed foods, which can result in higher energy levels and better mental health. Eating home-cooked meals five or more days a week is even associated with a longer life. "New Study Finds Eating Out Is Cheaper Than Cooking at Home." For people who love to cook, that's pretty much like reading "New Study Says, Earth Is Flat." Cooking at home is cheaper than

eating out, hands down. When we eat at a restaurant, we pay for not only the food, but also the costs of running that business. The lights, the water, the building, and the staff, in addition to the meal we are eating. No question, groceries are expensive and getting more so. The gap might be narrowing, but studies show that it is still cheaper to eat in. If you think the price of a steak grilled on a backyard BBQ is more expensive than your fav steak house? You probably want to be careful about traveling too close to the horizon, lest you fall off the edge of the earth. And what about those food delivery services? Research shows that on average, it is almost five times more expensive to order delivery from a restaurant than it is to cook at home. And if you're using a meal kit service as a shortcut to a home cooked meal, it's a bit more affordable, but still almost three times as expensive as cooking from scratch. Instead of spending your food dollars eating out, indulge in some new kitchen gadgets or invest in developing your cooking skills.

It's hard to beat the convenience of dining out. Having professionals prepare and serve the food, it is relaxing and eliminates the hassle of grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning up. Restaurants are often looked at as a convenience, a place to relax and have a good meal. However, I challenge this theory. Think about this, can you go to a restaurant and eat in your underwear and favorite pair of wholly socks? A little ridiculous, but the point is you're most comfortable in your own home. In addition, eating at home is not only more convenient, it costs less and, it is healthier. Furthermore, cooking at home makes everything flexible, right from timing to taste. With homemade food, you can do additions and subtractions as per you and your families taste, but with readymade or restaurant food you hardly have this comfort.

As if all that weren't enough. Home-cooked meals can also benefit the environment, by saving money and reducing our carbon footprint. Home cooking gives us the opportunity to choose real ingredients over processed meals, which also cuts down on packaging. Not to mention the endless amount of take out containers. Try to purchase ingredients from local farmers and/or grow your own, and you'll make an even bigger impact.

Still not convinced? Food brings people together and cooking at home is a great way to unite your family over the dining table. Everyone loves a home-cooked meal, even the moodiest of teenagers and picky eaters. Home cooking doesn't mean you have to spend hours in the kitchen combining hundreds of different ingredients or slavishly following elaborate recipes. In fact, simple meals are often the tastiest. And you don't have to be an accomplished chef. Whatever your abilities or experience as a cook, you can learn to prepare quick and healthy meals that can have real benefits for your pocketbook, and more importantly for your families mental and physical health.

Don't be afraid to take whisks. Happy cooking.

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