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Dear Teenagers,

I've had a passion for cooking for a couple of years, and I'm glad to say that it's one of my favorite things to do, and cooking delicious meals makes me feel accomplished. My discourse community and I have agreed that it's essential to cook your food, and I'm writing this letter because I feel like it's essential to cook your own food. My discourse community is a small Instagram group chat with people I've met online and have yet to meet in person. We take delight in making meals from each other cultures and even American 'culture.' We show each other pictures and videos of the meals we make, even if it's a simple breakfast of sunnyside up eggs and toast. We inspire each other by sending new recipes that we've made on our own or even found through Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. It may seem strange that I've picked this specific topic to write about, but I know that it would be much better for people's health overall. Ordering takeout or eating food in restaurants is a much easier alternative than cooking your own meals. But buying your own groceries and making the same kind of meals you buy from restaurants can save you a lot of money and your health. The same burger from McDonald's that barely has health benefits can be nutritional if you make your own. Therefore, the main issue that my discourse community and I face is getting ourselves and others to eat fewer meals from out, especially fast foods, and make our own.

This problem leads to many more issues that I'll be getting into. First off, I know groceries can get pretty expensive, especially if you only like organic produce, poultry, and meats. Another problem is not having enough time every day to make your own meals, and that's where takeout becomes very handy. Having a packed and busy schedule can get in the way of cooking for yourself. In addition to groceries being too expensive, that's where fast-food restaurants seem like reasonable prices on meals that'll make us full. However, on the bright side, when you buy your groceries, you don't finish all the groceries in one sitting, whereas when you order takeout, that's lots of money on just one meal. For example, if you're trying to eat cleaner and healthier, you can easily order a takeout salad, pay about \$12-\$20 and call it a day. But if you buy your own groceries to make a salad, it'll come out to the same price as that same takeout salad, but the benefit is that you can make much more salads with \$20 you just spent on groceries.

I know as teenagers, cooking may seem like it's pretty hard, but trust me, once you make yourself a meal and genuinely enjoy it, you'll want to keep trying to make more and new delicious recipes. While growing up, I always relied on my mother to make me food, so I never felt the need to learn how to cook. But my mother usually made Palestinian dishes. When I wanted different food from different backgrounds, I realized that I could learn to make them myself instead of spending a lot of money on takeout. In my opinion, I enjoy the fact that I know the food I cook myself is much cleaner and has fewer calories.

Furthermore, cooking at home is better for your health overall. I know most teenagers nowadays worry about their appearance and whether they look healthy or not, and I've felt this

way before too. So cooking at home allows you to track the macros in your food (calories, carbohydrates, fat, and protein.) This way, you have more control over the food that goes into your body and the overall management of your health. Not only is eating healthier for your physical health, but it also helps with mental health, and I know as teenagers, suffering from mental health is a real issue. Back to physical health, if you're a person with food allergies and find yourself getting sick from eating takeout or in restaurants, you can avoid this problem significantly by making it yourself. Convenience foods are higher in chemical additives, hormones, salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats. A McDonald's big mac contains about 1,007mg of sodium. If you made your burger, you'd only need a few pinches of salt to season your ground meat. You can even make your burger meat by adding more seasonings that'll make it even tastier. I personally like to add garlic, onion, and cayenne pepper powder for more flavor to my burgers.

Another example is one of the fast foods meals that I enjoy making on my own. A crunch wrap supreme from Taco Bell is about 530 calories, with 21g total fat, 6g saturated fat, 71g carbohydrates, 16g protein, and 1,200 mg sodium. 71g of carbs in just one meal is already too unhealthy. Imagine all the carbohydrates that'll break down into glucose in your body. Cooking your food can save you from many diseases. Julia A. Wolfson says, "Obesity is an escalating public health problem that contributes to other serious health issues, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease." This quote illustrates how the food they eat is the reason for their deadly diseases for most people. Obesity mostly comes from eating too many fats, sugars, and carbs.

To conclude, I hope as teenagers; you give cooking your meals even if it's every now and then a go. You'll find many new things about yourself and your interests in the cooking world. One of the most fantastic things that I'm fascinated with is how the meals I enjoy eating from restaurants are genuinely made. I view cooking as an art, and I strongly encourage others to paint the picture themselves (cooking on your own) and buy the art pre-made.

Sincerely,

Fedaa Khalil

Resources:

“Study Suggests Home Cooking Is a Main Ingredient in Healthier Diet.” *Center for a Livable Future*,

<https://clf.jhsph.edu/about-us/news/news-2014/study-suggests-home-cooking-main-ingredient-healthier-diet>