



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

The Food Conundrum

The disconnect between society and celebrity chefs

by Tayler Rozon, BAsC, Applied Human Nutrition

Celebrity chefs have become some of our most recognized superstars. Several are traditional, while others are distinct and trendy, though they each share a commonality in delivering mouth-watering and inspirational dishes in an entertaining way.

How many viewers, however, actually re-create these dishes and adopt their chef's philosophies?

Food-focused television is a recent and growing phenomenon. Often though, there is a major disconnect between the food show and ads from sponsors. The shows expose the audience to brightly coloured vegetables, home-grown herbs and fresh meat, all prepared quickly into appetizing dishes. Break for commercials and highly processed, less-healthy foods flash across the screen providing viewers with a very mixed message about what to cook for dinner.

Most celebrity chefs appreciate wholesome ingredients and encourage viewers to prepare flavourful home-cooked meals. Many Canadians agree in principle and have hopped on the healthy diet and lifestyle bandwagon. This highlights another disconnect that can occur. The nutritious, made-with-love meals from the Food Network don't fit our busy schedules. We cannot seem to allocate the time for planning, shopping and essential food preparation to make a home-cooked dinner.

The food industry answers the call with quick to prepare, pre-packaged food. Instead of preparing the more nutrient dense, made-from-scratch meals as seen on cooking shows, we often rely on convenience foods which are not as nutritionally sound. Grocery stores are bursting at the seams with manufactured products, including an overwhelming variety of processed foods. As selection within grocery stores has vastly increased, so has the number of fast food chains offering affordable, speedy options, away from home.

As a result, we consume more calories, sugar, sodium, fat and less fibre than are recommended. Many of the production methods used in the creation of processed foods result in the breakdown of nutrients, requiring the addition of man-made vitamins, minerals, additives and preservatives.

Food has always been a way to bring people together and to create bonds. Only a generation ago, food consumed at the table was homemade and often home-grown. There was no emphasis on 'fat-free' or 'lower sugar' and food was consumed in moderation. Today, with more disposable income, more ready-to-eat food and more hectic timetables, we can get distracted from our goal of healthy eating.

It may be time to revert to the basics of home-cooked meals and well-balanced diets.

Chefs such as Julia Child and Dione Lucas, pioneers of food entertainment, focused their dishes on using ingredients that could be found in every pantry. They made divine cooking simple. The food entertainment industry has evolved to a point where a number of chefs now appeal to a variety of ethnicities, cooking styles, and demographics. There really is a chef for everyone. Although each celebrity chef has his or her own style, rooted in their differences is the same passion for fresh ingredients. Yet questions remain. Are celebrity chefs role models, or simply icons? Has the hype of their celebrity status made their skills seem unattainable?

Still it seems that the chefs we admire do have it right. Most have stuck to traditional food while exploring contemporary ingredients and styles.

Tips to make meals easier to prepare and more healthful:

- Reduce your reliance on processed foods. Try learning to cook a few simple dishes from scratch;
- Make cooking a priority. Schedule shopping and meal preparation into your timetable every week;
- Shop farmer's markets or the perimeter of the grocery store where wholesome food can be found;
- Shop for local foods that may have a higher nutrient content than imported - if freshly harvested;
- Spend time on weekends washing and chopping fresh vegetables and fruits to be ready for wholesome cooking or for quick snacks to help you avoid processed foods;
- Make large batches of pasta sauces, casseroles and soups to freeze in individual or family-sized portions for convenience;
- Include variety to avoid repetitive burnout. Try new ingredients to keep meals interesting. The more variety of food, the more variety of nutrients!

We appear to crave food entertainment and convenience. While food will always be an essential and enjoyable part of life, we need to get the most out of it - nutritionally.

Tayler Rozon is a recent graduate of the University of Guelph where she studied Applied Human Nutrition. The Applied Human Nutrition program is accredited by Dietitians of Canada. Tayler was the second place winner in the 2012 OHEA Student Media Release Competition. During university, she was President of the Canadian Association of Food Service Professionals (Student Branch) and Coordinator of the Snack Program at Sacred Heart Catholic School. She is pursuing a career in food product development and communication.

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Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA), a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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