



Excerpts from...

PLANSIMPLE
Meals





STEP THREE

Setting a Rhythm

“In the tapestry of childhood, what stands out is not the splashy, blow-out trips to Disneyland but the common threads that run throughout and repeat: the family dinners, nature walks, reading together at bedtime, Saturday morning pancakes.”

– Kim John Payne, *Simplicity Parenting*

Rhythm is the most important component of lasting change. I like to think of rhythm as “routine with love and flow,” or a “series of practical rituals.” Rhythm is something that can expand or contract, so it fits into your life at any given moment.

This is in stark contrast to a schedule which is made up of blocks of time. With kids, it is easy to get off schedule and feel delayed. When we operate from this place of rigidity, it is very easy to fall behind when we have a hundred more tasks left in the day.

Let me share a story about how I’ve seen rhythm work with food and children: All three of my kids cycled through the same kindergarten class at a Waldorf school. Waldorf philosophy puts a strong emphasis on rhythm with its students. In kindergarten, all three of my students were in Ms. Leah’s class, who created a different healthy snack

each day of the week. Monday is bake bread day. Tuesday is porridge day. And the day that had a huge impact on my family was Thursday – vegetable day.

With all three of my kids, I watched as vegetables became a topic of conversation. Through the rhythm of vegetable day, a natural curiosity and interest in healthy food was created. And, through the course of their years in kindergarten, my kids each started getting a little bit more adventurous when it came to food.

Each of my children reacted a little differently to vegetable day, and it was fun to witness their respective journeys. I will never forget the day that my son, our first kindergartener, requested sautéed spinach with “brown sauce” for dinner one evening. It was even before my healthy transformation, so not only could I not believe my ears, but also I had no

idea how to make it. To this day, seven years later, he asks regularly for sautéed greens.

My daughter, who was second to experience vegetable day, had a different experience. I don't know that she's ever loved her sautéed greens, but she became very smitten with pickled vegetables. Interestingly, she's my pickiest eater, but she just loved the pickled garlic and green beans.

At a farmer's market recently, my kids were delighted to find a woman selling pickled food. All three of my kids started jumping for joy after picking up jar after jar. My son grabbed a jar of pickled asparagus. My daughter a jar of pickled green beans. My youngest rejoiced over the pickled garlic. The looks of the people around them were priceless. I wish I could've had a picture of their faces, seeing these three little kids so excited about pickled vegetables.

Watching the kindergarten students navigate Ms. Leah's snacks was fascinating. At the beginning of the year, some kids pick at the food or simply move it around their plates. At some point, either boredom or curiosity or acceptance causes them to try the new dish they resisted at first. By the end of the year, it really is a rare case of a child who doesn't love at least one new thing. The rhythm around snacks gives kids the permission to ease into new foods without letting them off the hook. While each of my children had a unique experience in Ms. Leah's class, I observed them collectively begin to embrace nutrient-rich, unprocessed, sugar-free foods by the year's end.

I took careful note. Create a rhythm. Stick to it. Show up each day with a smile and hold consistent to your food "why."

YOU: ROUTINES AND RITUALS

How often have you felt overwhelmed by the time you've gathered the kids for school in the morning? I am talking 8 am. Most days start off with the best of intentions — you wake up on time, make breakfast, and pack lunches— yet everybody's scrambling to get out the door and causing chaos. So many mornings, by the time you're in the car, you're furious and gritting your teeth.

But what would happen if you applied the same principles to your morning as the ones Ms. Leah applied to snack time?

.....
TRIAL: a series of actions or type of behavior regularly and invariably followed by someone.
.....

The amazing thing about using rhythm to create change is that your new habits will fit into your life with ease. The most important mindset shift most of us have to make is letting go of the clock, and the anxiety it so often creates.

Instead of thinking I have to do this at this time and that at that time, instead build your day around the key rituals you have already committed to: your meals.

And, here is the thing I want you to hear again and again. Getting out the door in the morning has a lot more to do with you than you might think. It is not about your daughter who would rather sleep in, or the child who can never decide what to wear. It is not about your son who seems always to be tripping over himself as he gathers his stuff to get out the door or the one who hits his sister when you just need him to get in the car.

My guess is that from the time you wake up in the morning to the time you manage to get out the door and start your day, you've forgotten the needs of the most important person — you.

So let's change that.

I can promise you that if you feel nurtured by the time you are in the car, your energy will be 100% different than it would've been if you hadn't nurtured yourself.

If there are parts of your morning that trigger your anger or take away from your peaceful attitude, try to shift those. For example, if your daughter takes too long to choose her clothes, make picking out an outfit part of the evening rhythm. If you are all forgetting to brush teeth, then do it as a family. If you are always running up and down the stairs

between food prep and helping a child, see how you can make that process better — maybe it is as simple as a hug ritual, so your child feels attended to, or maybe she can get dressed downstairs while you prep breakfast. You can also just decide to change your attitude about a task, like packing lunches or washing dishes. Instead of seeing these things as chores, see them as your means to a healthy lifestyle. If it is fun for you, someday, your kids will want to take over that job!

As kids get older, they become more self-sufficient and can support you more. They also might need a little less sleep. They might also be more aware of the food that they need in the morning. Once you have written self-care into your rhythm, then we can move into creating a rhythm that serves your whole family.

MAMA'S ROUTINE EXERCISE

Write down all those things that you, as a grown up, need to get accomplished from the time you wake up to the time your kids get out the door. Don't make it all about packing lunches and doing stuff for the kids — list those things but also list the things you have always wanted to do or used to do for yourself. Don't worry about how you will accomplish these things — let yourself dream.

If you have always wanted to meditate, write that down. If exercise is important, maybe you figure out a way to sneak out of the house and go for a quick walk before you're in the kitchen making breakfast. Other ideas include: brush your teeth, take a shower, get dressed in non-yoga clothes, make a green smoothie, drink water, pack your own lunch, kiss your spouse, hug your kids, take a supplement, breathe, write in a journal, take care of your skin... the list could go on!

Write them all down. Then look at the list. Cross off anything that is not necessary. Circle the things that family members could help you with. Put a heart

next to the one thing that is popping off the page as something that will light you up each morning. Put everything in order. Lead up to breakfast and then lead out the door. Post it on the fridge as you get used to your new rhythm.

Now take the same idea and make a nighttime rhythm that starts with walking in the door, leads to dinner and ends when you go to sleep. It could include any of the ideas above: read a book, leave your electronics downstairs, light a candle, take a bath, connect with your spouse, call your mom, prepare food for another day, wash dishes, say a prayer, read with the kids, stretch.

Make sure to check in with your list from time to time to see if it needs amendments. After all, you are a different person at 30 than at 40, and your needs change. I can't speak past that, but I'm sure things are different at 50 too. Likewise, our kids' rhythms change.

{You can download the worksheet at www.plansimplemealsbook.com/hub}

FAMILY: FINDING THE RHYTHM THAT WORKS

One of the ways that we can add rhythm into our family mealtimes is by doing exactly what I explained in that story of the kindergarten class, where each meal was labeled by theme. Food themes can be assigned to each day of the week and each meal. I have found that food themes are a fabulous place to start in really changing how you eat.

THE FOOD IDEAS IN THIS BOOK WILL BE ORGANIZED BY THESE THEMES:

Breakfast

Porridge Day
Granola Day
Fruit Day
Muffin Day
Fruit and Fancy Drink Day
Smoothie and Toast Day
“Yogurt” Day
Pancake Day

Lunch

Pasta Day
Leftover Day
Salad Day
Wrap Day
Dip Day
Unsandwich Day
Soup Day

Dinner

Bean Day
Wrap Night
Kids Cook Day
Pasta Day
Rice Bowl Day
Soup Day
Farm-to-Table Day
Cookbook Day
Clean out the Fridge Day

The amazing thing about this system is it makes life easier for us parents as well as for kids. How often have you panicked at 5:00 pm thinking, “S***! What’s for dinner?” Without rhythm, a few unhealthy things begin to happen. We tend to cook the same things over and over. We make compromised choices on what foods we are eating. We give into what kids think they want and like very easily because at that moment our energy is low and our willpower is weak — we just want to get dinner done.

The beauty of daily food themes is that they are flexible enough to provide a variety of dishes that utilize the season we are in. Themes also create a structure that quells the daily anxiety that sometimes comes with meals and new foods — both for the cook and the kids.

When kids protest about a meal, it is usually just a way for them to test control. Sometimes when they say no, it’s not even that they don’t really want what’s in front of them, but more that they want to take charge over that moment. As a child grows, he or she will naturally push back on boundaries just to see what happens when they do. Sticking to meal themes is a really effective way of eliminating that by offering consistency.

Take soup day for example. While every child might not love soup, if it appears rhythmically throughout the week, say every Wednesday, there’s a higher chance that a child will warm up to it over time. Then, as the weeks carry on, maybe the soup changes and includes new ingredients, vegetables, broths or spices. Generally, my children have become more adventurous using this technique, though of course some meals are still more liked than others.



RHYTHM STRATEGY

Try consistent food themes for three weeks and just observe how it changes your level of organization as a parent and also how your kids show up to a meal.

RHYTHM PLANNING EXERCISE

Think of the natural course your week takes and notice the ebbs and flows. Pay attention to which days feel busy and which days have some space. Get out a piece of paper and write it all down, organized by days. Then look at the themes provided or make your own and mark ones that feel easy and ones that feel challenging. If you have older kids, Kids Cook Day might be a way to get you off the hook on a busy day while if your kids are little, Kids Cook Day might feel totally draining. This is a very personal process.

(Get the rhythm planning template at <http://www.PlanSimpleMealsBook.com/hub>)

Don't forget that some meals can be made in advance pretty easily. And know that every day does not have to be different. You can have two soup nights, or oatmeal three days a week. I highly recommend moms having a big salad every day for lunch, so that would be the same every day!

You might have to revisit this at different times of the year— one system for when the kids are in school and one for when they're out. Seasons play a part in our sense of rhythm too, so for now focus on the one you are in.

So often we revert to feeding kids what we know they will eat after a tantrum because really, we just want them to eat. We start to think less about what they're eating out of necessity and desperation. But because it is soup day, I stand on firm ground and serve it with way more confidence than I would have on an unplanned day. I think kids pick up on our strengths and our weaknesses. When we aren't fully confident behind a meal we serve, kids sense that and test us.

In his book, *Simplicity Parenting*, Kim John Payne mentions how it takes a child seven times to like a food. Yet how often have we given up after one tantrum, if not two? Seven times is a lot. But, when you have benchmarks and consistency around food and mealtime, along with a formulaic approach to incorporating the new, then seven times feels a lot more doable.

To allow these themed meals to create a rhythm in your house, it's helpful first to observe the natural way your life already flows. That way, you can begin to insert the rhythm of food with harmony, instead of forcing new habits that work against you. For example, if Tuesday nights are busy with after-school activities, or a time when you often have to work late, then it is best to keep Tuesday's dinner simple. Do something easy, like pasta day or soup (that you have made over the weekend) day. On the flip side, when you're looking at your schedule and notice there's a day that perhaps the kids get out of school early or your workload is lighter, then push yourself. One of my favorite challenges during my week is Cookbook Day when I decide to conquer a new recipe with my kids. It's fun, but definitely takes a bit more time and patience, so it happens on a quieter day — when there is less school, work, or outside activities.



RHYTHM IS LIKE GOLD FOR PARENTS — CONSISTENCY HELPS PARENTS MAKE AND PREPARE FOOD WITH EASE, WHILE CHILDREN FEEL THE SAFETY OF REPETITION AND PREDICTABILITY.

As you begin to fit good food into your rhythm, you will naturally want to optimize the rhythms already happening around you. Then the steady passing of time becomes something you savor as a family. Maybe your family enjoys outdoor meals, farmer’s markets, or hikes during the summer and hot tea and board games in the winter. Maybe you learn to love prepping healthy meals on the weekend, helping hands with the dishes, and the extra time to snuggle up and read with your kids in front of a fire.

Look at your schedule. Look at what you have said yes to. Are there too many things that are fighting with your healthy lifestyle? Have you said yes to being class parent, babysitting someone else’s child on Saturdays, or extra hours at work with your boss? Have you said yes to everything your child wants to do and added some extra activities yourself to make him more well-rounded? I am here to tell you

that a quiet afternoon at home may make your child smarter and more resilient, and it will make space for good food, rest, and exercise!

MAKING SPACE

While time can feel constraining, rhythm flows naturally. Create a rhythm to your meals that fits your life, and then consider how you can shift the activities in your life to make more room for food.



Food: Dinner

“The shared meal is no small thing. It is a foundation of family life, the place where our children learn the art of conversation and acquire the habits of civilization: sharing, listening, taking turns, navigating differences, arguing without offending.”

— Michael Pollan, *Cooked*

First of all, let's go into the purpose of dinner. So far we've looked at breakfast, which is really about getting adults and kids off to a great start — towards green smoothies and away from cereal in a rhythm that flows effortlessly. Lunch becomes that opportunity where we can take care of our individual needs a little bit more — we teach ourselves and our family to listen to our bodies and nurture them when out in a world where this may still be a foreign concept. Dinner is different. At dinner we assemble at the table after our respective busy days. We come together to share food and company.

If there is a family “classroom,” the dinner table is it. Dinner is the time where we can really teach our kids how to be good eaters. We can teach them about conversation. We can teach them about giving and receiving love. We can teach them listening skills.

And what's most remarkable is that all this happens naturally, effortlessly, just by the nature of sitting at the table together and sharing the same food.

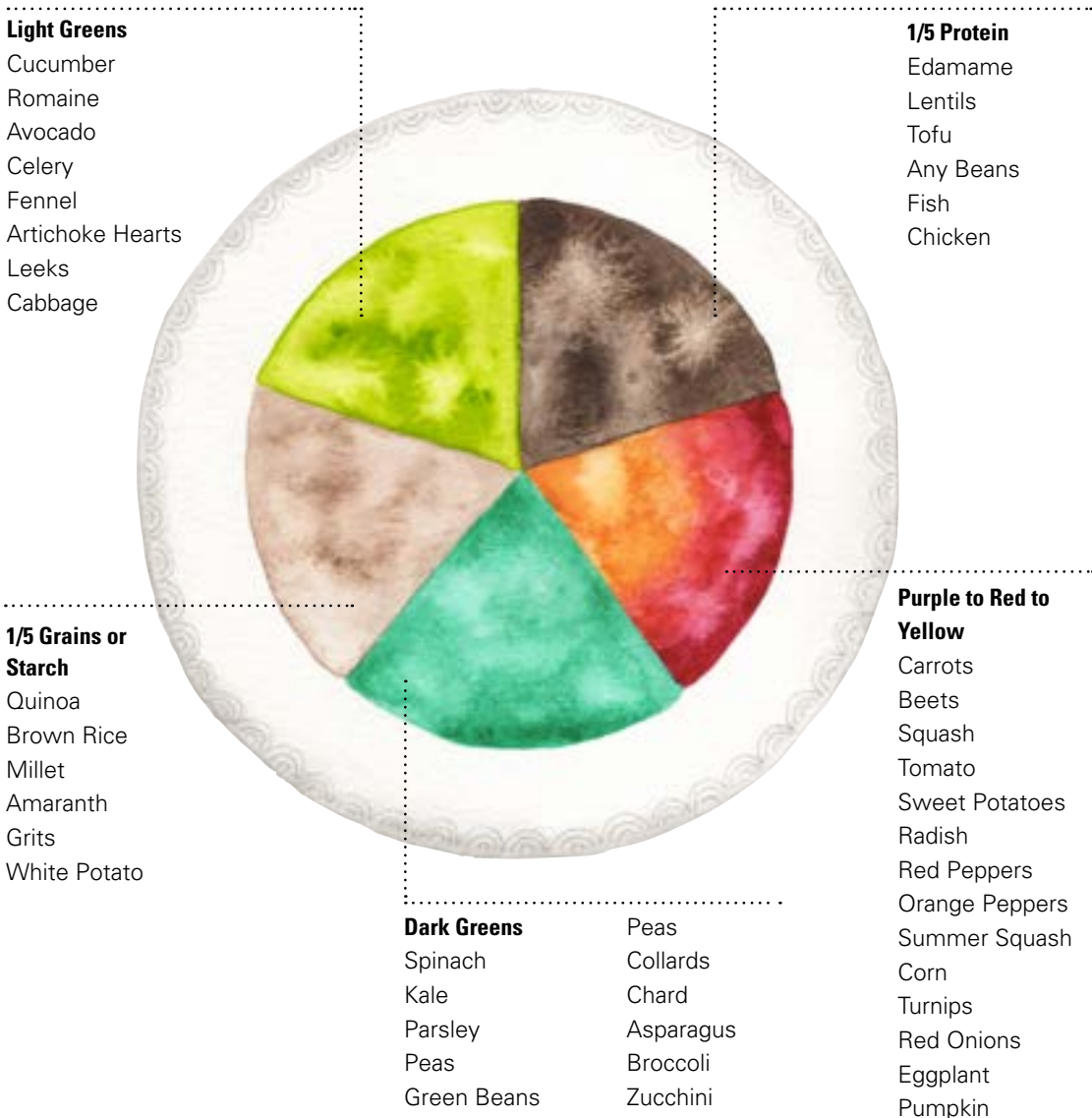
Dinner is an opportunity that we should all embrace because it is the fastest path to a healthy family — in 45 minutes well spent, kids can be equipped for life. Consider all the tools I've introduced in the previous step about rhythm. By now I hope you have a sense of what you can do in your day to make dinner happen easier. Remember “moving food forward,” working with your schedule, and being repetitive about what you eat are all things that can help create the space for family dinner.

Dinner is a great time to lovingly nudge our kids, which basically means lead by example, and challenge them in a safe environment to eat a variety of new foods.

VEGGIE-CENTERED MODEL

Let's start by reconsidering the plate. It is as easy as shifting around proportions and building meals around vegetables instead of around a protein or starch. The optimal proportions on your family plate should be 1/5 protein, 1/5 grain or starch, and 3/5 a vibrant rainbow of vegetables.

If this seems confusing, don't worry about it too much. Consider it your end goal rather than your starting place. Like the other meals, I've created seven formulas to help make dinner successful. These formulas will yield enough variety within a year and also be a way to make kids appreciate different foods and expand their pallets gradually.



FROM PICKY TO ADVENTUROUS

With dinner, we will consider different strategies for how to move a picky eater, or simply a child who has not yet been convinced about healthy food, forward.

(There is a worksheet over in the book hub, www.PlanSimpleMealsBook.com/hub)

1

Know where you are.

Don't try to go from 0 to 100. Be OK with today and know that eating well is a process, much like learning to read, that your child will get with time and practice.

2

Start with what your children like.

Build meals based on food they already like, at first. If your son likes carrots, make a new dish with carrots. If your daughter likes pasta or pizza, start playing with adding more veggies, and making the processed parts from scratch.

3

Observe.

You want to commit to moving forward but not too fast. Sometimes "picky" does not have to do with the food but the situation. Other times it may be about texture and size of a vegetable. This may differ from child to child. Take time to notice without judgment.

4

Have a plan.

Know that you may have to reintroduce one food 7 times. Charting your progress in writing is pretty helpful, so you know you are getting closer to 7 times. I find people who set out to try 7 times find success much faster.

7

Celebrate.

Please don't praise your kids for eating. Do pat yourself on the back when meals go well, and simply say, "what a great meal!" As meals become more diverse, they will be celebrations in themselves!

6

Rinse and Repeat.

This process will feel different with each new food and at the various stages of each child. Get in the habit of doing this a few times in a row until making new things becomes second nature for you, and trying new things, becomes second nature for your child(ren).

5

Have a partner.

Tell your spouse, your mom, or a friend about your experiments. Sometimes it is nice to do this with a group of moms. Make sure you have a tribe who has your back. Feel free to join our group at HealthyMomsMeetup.com if you want me and an amazing group of moms as your partners!

A close-up photograph of a bowl filled with a bean salad. The salad consists of white beans, diced orange carrots, and sliced green cucumbers. The bowl is decorated with a black floral pattern and has a red rim. A silver spoon is visible on the right side of the bowl. In the background, a blurred bowl contains more sliced cucumbers and carrots. The bowl sits on a patterned tablecloth with a red scalloped edge.

DINNER RHYTHM

BEAN DAY

For us, Bean Day is on Monday, but it could be any day of the week for you. I grew up in New Orleans where it's tradition to have red beans and rice on Mondays, because it's also wash day. Beans take a long time to cook if they start dried, so it was something that could be stirred in between all the washing that needed to be done. Mondays were always the perfect days to do both these things together.

Beans can be simple, and every bean tastes different, so there are lots of ways to explore. I will challenge you to try to cook with dried beans. Though they may take longer than beans from a can, there's less chance of BPA's, and dried beans are available in many more varieties. They're usually fresher, easier to digest (especially if you sprout them before you cook them), and they're just delicious.

CHOOSE A TYPE

Black beans
Adzuki beans
Red beans
Soldier beans
Lentils
Chickpeas
Pinto beans
Calypso beans
Navy beans
Fava beans
Black-eyed peas

PREP BEANS.

Rinse beans and soak them overnight (except for lentils, black-eyed peas and adzuki beans).

For most beans, 2 cups dried beans equals 4 to 5 cups cooked beans.

CHOOSE A METHOD FOR COOKING.

Cooking Method 1

Cook plain and flavor after — especially if you want to use a portion for a cake or brownies!

Cooking Method 2

Sauté an onion in olive oil.

Add diced (or blended) tomato.

When it turns into an orange paste, add beans and water.

Salt to taste.

Cooking Method 3

Sauté an onion in olive oil.

Add finely diced celery and green pepper.

When it is fully cooked, add beans and water.

Salt to taste.

ADD EXTRA VEGGIES.

Do this step if your family loves beans and are ready to move onto the next variation.





FALL ADD-INS

Carrot and thyme
Sweet potato and
squash with cumin
Kale and extra
tomato and basil

WINTER ADD-INS

Potato and spinach
Cauliflower,
carrots and herbs
de Provence
Brussels sprouts
and garlic

SPRING ADD-INS

Swiss chard
Fennel and cabbage
Spring peas and
onion

SUMMER ADD-INS

Eggplant, zucchini,
and extra tomato
Cool with raw
veggies, lemon, salt
and fresh basil
Cool with fresh corn,
beets and vinaigrette



A pressure cooker is a very helpful tool that's made such a difference in my house. With a pressure cooker, you can soak beans overnight, let them sprout for a few hours, cook them in enough liquid so the beans are covered for about 12 minutes, and they're done. Whereas normally if you put them in a big stock pot, they might take up to three hours.



BEAN FORMULA IN ACTION

NEW ORLEANS RED BEANS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound dry red kidney beans
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic
- 1 large onion
- 4 stalks celery
- 1 green bell pepper
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons thyme
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1-2 teaspoons chipotle pepper
- Sea salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Soak beans overnight in a large bowl filled with enough filtered water to cover beans by 2”.
2. Chop garlic, onion, celery and pepper very fine (the easiest way to do this is in a food processor if you have one), putting them in separate bowls.
3. Sauté the chopped veggies in the olive oil. Start with the garlic and onion, then add the celery and pepper after a few minutes.
4. When almost cooked through, add herbs, and stir into cooked veggies.
5. If using a pressure cooker, add beans and vegetable mix with just enough water to cover the beans and cook at 2 lines for 12 minutes.
6. If cooking on the stovetop, add beans and vegetable mix to a large pot with enough water to cover the beans by 1”. Cook on medium-low heat, covered. After one hour, check on the beans; skim any foam off the top, then stir and add water to cover if needed. Continue checking each half-hour. Cooking time may be 1-2 hours depending on the freshness of the beans.

BLACK BEANS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large onion
- 2 tomatoes
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1–2 tablespoons ancho chili powder
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- Sea salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 lb. bag dried black beans
- Veggie broth or bouillon cube or powder
- 4 cups brown rice, cooked

DIRECTIONS

1. Rinse beans under cold water.
2. Soak dried beans in water to cover by at least 2 inches for six hours, or overnight.
3. Finely dice the onion.
4. Finely dice tomato, or throw it in the blender for pickier eaters or just for ease.
5. Sauté the onion in the olive oil until soft and translucent. Add the tomatoes and cook until you have a dark orange paste (about 10 minutes).
6. Add chili powder and cook for another minute.
7. Add the beans and cover with water.
8. Cook for 11 minutes in pressure cooker or up to 2 hours in a stock pot, adding water as necessary.
9. Serve over brown rice.



LENTILS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. bag French lentils
- 1 onion
- 1 large tomato or 2 small ones
- 2 cups chopped cauliflower (half a head)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Sea salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Finely dice onion, tomato and cauliflower separately.
2. Sauté the onion in olive oil until it starts to become translucent.
3. Add tomato and keep cooking until the mixture starts to turn orange.
4. Add lentils and cauliflower and quickly add enough water to cover.
5. Cook until lentils are tender, and cauliflower is falling apart, and salt to taste.
6. Serve over brown rice.



ABOUT MIA

Mia Moran envisions a world where kids crave salads, moms feel healthy and energetic all day, and the whole family feels fabulous after every meal. Mia guides busy parents to make simple changes for lifelong health and happiness, and help their families do the same.

As a working mom of three running her own successful design studio for 15 years, Mia created Plan Simple Meals **to help other busy parents learn to eat clean, make family dinner happen seven nights a week, and manage food allergies and healthy weight with ease.** Her content has been described as “Martha Stewart meets Waldorf.” “Doable and real.” and “The only system that has ever worked for my family.”

Mia draws on her experience of going from overweight and overwhelmed to energetic and blissful by mastering small, doable steps one day at a time. Mia is an international bestselling author, creator of the PlanSimple™ system, speaker, blogger, entrepreneur... and most importantly, a mom! Mia lives outside Boston, MA with her husband and three children.

Let Mia help you discover how to balance food, family, and a busy life with simplicity and ease.

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