

The sample below illustrates the final product. If you wish to see the original Word document with edits in tracked changes, please email alice@crealitygroup.org.

IN THE BEGINNING

It is better to take many small steps in the right direction than to make a great leap forward only to stumble backward.
—Old Chinese Proverb

I am not one of those people who like to mess with my family's food. I want my kids to grow up with a real sensible attitude to food, so I swerve fads, and I don't eat any differently to them – I am their role model, and I cannot say one thing and then do another.

But this is not to say that I don't want to look great and feel good. I want to eat food that works with my body and keeps me lean and fit.

What I like about clean eating (or eating clean, depending on your whim) is that it does not contain the word "diet." This is not a temporary change to the way I eat just to get to a set target. This is a change in mindset about the type of food I choose to provide to my family. It is a nutritional plan which, when I discovered it, made me yell: "Finally!" I finally have some sensible guidance on how to eat in line with nature and my body.

What is also great about clean eating is that you can choose your level. You can make small changes that make some difference, or you can fully embrace the philosophy and go raw.

But I have leapt ahead here. Let me first tell you a little about what it means to eat cleanly. Put simply, it is about avoiding processed and refined foods. The more manufacturers mess with food, the more it is likely to contain chemicals that are not helpful to our health. These chemicals can introduce free radicals into our body, which are proven to contribute to heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, or sometimes they just introduce toxins that make us feel just plain bad!

Food plans are difficult when all they do is tell you what you cannot eat. It is bad for our psychology. You have heard the analogy of the blue elephant, right? If I tell you not to think about a blue elephant, what does your rebellious brain do? Exactly – there is a whole herd of bright blue elephants crowded in the kitchen. The same happens with food. “Don’t eat carbs,” and all you want to eat is pasta. “Don’t eat dairy” – break out the ice cream!

So what and how should you eat? Here are some generic guidelines and tips that will be explored more in detail in the next few chapters, as we apply them to the various levels of clean eating.

Whole foods

There is still some confusion over the usage of this term, but by whole foods here we mean unprocessed and unrefined foods, or products that were processed and refined as little as possible. Of course, this includes anything that comes straight from the grower or producer, so visiting your local farm shop is great advice. Rather than drinking it as juice, eat the actual fruit or vegetable as it comes out of the ground. Free-range, grass-fed produce is best, and whole grains, unsalted nuts, and unflavored seeds are all examples of whole foods.

Check the label

Eat a product only when you recognize all the ingredients on the label. If there are any numbers or seven-syllable chemical compounds, then you know that this is heavily processed food. Foods like wholegrain pasta and natural cheese, though processed to a degree, are still pretty clean eating. It is all to do with your level of zeal. I personally still serve up cheeses that I buy from a local farm store, just because we love them too much. Don’t you worry, I cover more details about labels in the “Your Shopping List” chapter. But if you take it slow, the changes you make will come intuitively.

Eat small

The trick with clean eating is to eat more regularly. Your food won’t be as filling because it is not bulked up by heavily processed components. This means you should plan five or six meals a day. This will stop you and your family from snacking unhealthily, but it will also boost your metabolism and keep you in shape. This is not a nutritional plan that promotes food restriction; there is no need to deprive yourself. If you are hungry, eat. Just eat something small and natural, with limited processing and refinement.

Cook

What all this means is cooking. If you are buying pre-made meals from the local supermarket, they will come processed and full of refined sugars. You need to source your own ingredients and know how they are being prepared. It is in the preparation that a lot of nutrients are lost, and a lot of toxins are introduced.

Say goodbye to refined sugar

There is one small, tiny “do not eat” when clean eating: sugar. Sugar offers nothing but unnecessary calories to your nutrition. But that doesn’t mean no treats! I have devoted some sections to treats in this book because my kids and I love sweet food; who doesn’t, every now and then? Just replace refined sugar with natural sweeteners like honey. This can be a tough one for you and your kids; chocolate is a big no-no on a clean eating plan, though 80% dark chocolate with a Fairtrade label could just about sneak in if no one is looking. See, there are always things you *can* eat and satisfy your cravings!

What will you gain out of all this?

There is no point in making a commitment unless there is something in it for you. This should not be about following a fad or doing something out of peer pressure. What benefits will clean eating give to you?

One: you will find it easier to maintain your weight. You will still need to exercise, but you are more likely to see the impact of that exercise.

Two: it reduces the chances of getting diseases that plague modern life. Free radicals and toxins that cause heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and maybe even neurological diseases such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s are likely to be introduced into our bodies via processed foods.

Three: it is the best way to get your “five a day” in fruit and vegetables and all the nutrients your body needs to be healthy and feel good.

Four: the longer you stick to this plan, the easier it gets. Sugar cravings will drop and so will your desire for junk food – you just won’t think about it anymore the longer you stay away from it! Whole food also keeps you full for longer, so you won’t be thinking about food the whole time.

Five: it will keep your digestive system regular, flushing toxins and helping you feel great. When you feel good, when your kids feel good, you are all likely to try to look after yourselves in all the other important ways too!

How this book is organized for you

I get that we are all different. Some of you will want to dive in head first and go for the pure, clean eating diet. If so, you can skip the first chapters and head to “Hard core raw.” Cooking is processing, so if you want to do this “properly,” then you need to go raw.

But if like me, and definitely like my kids, you need to take small steps, then start at the beginning of the book. You can begin by making tiny changes that improve the way you eat. As you get used to the principles, you can move through the book and add in new elements as you go.

If you are the sort that tries something and then lapses, don't worry! Just try again with your next meal. This is not a diet, remember? Clean eating should be a slow evolution – a continual devotion to making small changes that mean you are committed to caring for yourself and your closest humans.

Enjoy the recipes – they have been chosen because they taste great too! I loved trying them out as I was writing this book, so I know you will enjoy them too.

SMALL CHANGES

Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.

—Robert Collier

The first step is to start making small changes to your favorite recipes or your long-held everyday habits.

Why? Well, making changes to your diet may seem daunting, and every journey starts with one small step. I remember a time when I decided to take out carbs from my diet right away. It was all over the news – the idea was to eat a lot of meat and maybe some seeds and nuts. For a long time, I thought I was turning into Hannibal Lector. “For a long time,” who am I kidding...it lasted no longer than a few days, and then I ate mashed potato from a large bowl. Just mashed potato. I can’t tell you how much I was craving those creamy potatoes.

Why was this change so difficult? Well, it was a revolution to my habits. First, I had to cook something different for me, as my husband and kids still ate a balanced diet. This is always a warning sign, isn’t it? Who would give the unhealthier diet to their children? Second, I wasn’t used to eating just meat for lunch; I was used to walking to the sandwich van with one of my friends or having a snack with a coffee. In other words, I was working counterintuitively to my muscle memory for the whole day. It was too hard.

What did all this revolutionary food behavior cause in my head? It meant that every moment I was thinking about food. Every living second I was planning how and where I could find some German sausages and at the same time formulate a meal plan for the evening for my loved ones. Man, I was hungry all the time.

It makes much more sense to make a small decision about something that is already a part of your routine. A good example? You can cut out one or two sugary drinks a day, replacing them with herbal tea. Not all your sugary drinks at first, just one or two – maybe the ones closer to sleep, which may be

adding to poor sleep hygiene. Or switch from canned vegetables to fresh and frozen. You may be surprised to hear that frozen vegetables retain more nutrients than the fresh that are kept in the store. Some purists of clean eating may disagree, but the longer the produce is on the shelf, the more of the goodness they lose. The ultimate choice would be to go to the farm shop and pick it up just as it left the field!

If you are pushed for time, you can pre-prepare salad to store in a large jar, making sure you place “wet” ingredients at the bottom, or cook food in bulk. Each of these choices will take some processing out of your diet, helping more nutrients into your body.

By not putting too much pressure on yourself, you will make your path to clean eating much easier. Clean eating is perfect for a graduated approach because it asks you to think about what you already eat and to make it more natural and less manufactured. This doesn't have to be done in a day or a week.

This chapter provides examples of some of the foods and dishes you might already eat in your normal diet. Even if you don't need a recipe for these, the chapter aims at giving you new ideas and a hint to the ingredients you should change or consider including so you can make a slow and steady start. As you go through, think about how you could do even more. The key question is this:

How can I get the ingredient that is closest to how it appears in nature?

Breakfast



Oatmeal

Oatmeal is an extremely good breakfast option. It contains plenty of fiber and will help keep you full until lunchtime, stopping you craving sugary, processed snacks.

If oatmeal gets boring, try adding berries, honey or cinnamon.

Fruit salad

Prepare a bowl of your favorite fruits; anything works here – apples, bananas, melon, mango, kiwi, pineapple, grapes, berries or anything you like.

To make it more interesting, add a tablespoon or two of low-fat natural yoghurt and sprinkle with some dried mint.