

Basic Tools for Healthy Cooking

Stocking your kitchen with tools and gadgets can either be amusing or confusing, depending on your cooking abilities. Here are the tools that every cook will want to have on hand.

The Essentials

- *Can/Bottle opener* – Whether hand-crank or electric, make sure to buy one that will stand up to repeated use. Wash and dry thoroughly after each use to prevent bacteria build-up.
- *Colander* – Buy a large metal or plastic strainer for draining pasta and rinsing fruits and vegetables.
- *Fire extinguisher & Pot holders* – Put safety first. Don't risk burning your hands or your house.
- *Grater* – A four-sided grater will give you many options for incorporating vegetables, cheese, or whole spices into your meals.
- *Instant-read digital thermometer* – An important item and small price to pay to make sure your meat is cooked properly. Look for one that includes a chart with proper cooking temperatures.
- *Mixing bowls* – Buy glass, stoneware or metal mixing bowls in two or three sizes.
- *Steamers* – A metal steamer placed on top of a pot of boiling water is a great way to cook fresh vegetables without losing the nutrients.
- *Timer* – Not all stove timers are accurate. Get a portable timer that you can carry with you while moving around the house.
- *Vegetable peeler* – Buy a peeler with a swivel head and comfortable handle. Use it for peeling potatoes, carrots or cucumbers.
- *Whisks* – Get one small and one medium-to-large, made of metal, nylon or plastic (for use in non-stick pans). Use for whipping up a last-minute omelet or blending ingredients for the perfect sauce.

Measuring Cups and Spoons

Accurate measurements are a must for the successful cook.

- One set of cups for dry ingredients in metal or plastic – including 1-cup, 1/2-cup, 3/4-cup, 1/3-cup measurements. If you can afford it, get two sets. You will save cleaning time as you cook.
- At least one glass measuring cup with spout, preferably one that can measure up to two cups and can handle hot liquids.
- A set of good quality measuring spoons made of metal or plastic and in various sizes: 1-Tablespoon, 1-teaspoon, 1/2-teaspoon, 1/4-teaspoon, 1/8-teaspoon.

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Knives

Keeping your knives sharp keeps you safer because less pressure is required to cut through food. Below is a list of the knives you will want to have in your kitchen.

- > A chef's knife has a wide triangular-shaped blade and is used for cutting and chopping almost all foods. You may want to purchase eight-inch knife if you have small hands.
- > Paring knives are used for almost everything else – slicing, peeling, and trimming. Three to four inches is a good size blade.
- > Serrated (rough rippled edges) knives are generally used for cutting bread, as well as certain fruits or vegetables.
- > A boning knife is longer than a paring knife and has a sharp point for de-boning meat, poultry and fish.
- > A slicing or carving knife has a long blade (8-10 inches), sometimes curved, and is used for slicing cooked meat and poultry.
- Don't forget to get a knife sharpener – electric or a stone – to help keep your knives in good cutting condition.
- To keep knives sharp, do not cut on porcelain, glass or metal surfaces. Do not use knives as a substitute for any other kind of tool, such as a screwdriver or bottle opener.
- Rinse food products off knives immediately after use. Some foods, like mayonnaise, can damage the fine edge of the blade.
- Hand-wash knives in hot, soapy water and dry after each use.
- Never put a knife into soapy water and leave it unattended. Someone could cut his or her hand when reaching into the soapy water.
- If you are unsure about sharpening a knife, take it to a professional.

Cutting Boards

Cutting boards may hide harmful germs. How many depends on how porous the surface is, the type of plastic or wood, and direction of the wood fibers.

- Choose a board with a smooth, hard surface that is approved for contact with food.
- Replace cutting boards that become deeply scratched, carved or grooved.
- Do not chop salad, vegetables or other ready-to-eat foods on an unwashed cutting board that has been used to trim raw meat, poultry or seafood. Always use a clean, separate, cutting board for fresh vegetables, fruits, breads, and other food that will not be cooked prior to eating.

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- Scrape off any food and scrub all cutting boards completely with hot soapy water after each use. Dishwashers are usually good cleaners for most cutting boards. However, the high temperatures in your dishwasher may damage thin plastic or wooden boards.
- Sanitize cutting boards from time-to-time with a mixture of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water. Over a sink, flood the board with the bleach mixture and let it stand a few minutes. Then, rinse completely with fresh water. Sanitize cutting boards after cutting raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Store cutting boards so that they stay clean, dry, and do not touch raw meat, poultry, seafood or their drippings.

Pots and Pans

Purchase heavier pots and pans made from cast aluminum, copper or stainless steel because they distribute heat evenly. You won't have to cook at high temperatures, so you will lower your chances of burning dinner! Pots with non-stick surfaces are easy to clean and can be used with little or no oil for healthy cooking. For baking pans, look for an "air bake" feature that helps prevent burning. Here's a list of the basics to have on hand:

- One 2 quart and one 4 quart sauce pan with tight-fitting lids.
- One 8 to 10-quart stockpot, for soups and pasta.
- One 8-inch ovenproof skillet and one 12 to 14-inch ovenproof skillet with lid.
- One large roasting pan with a rack for roasting meat.
- Broiler pan, for broiling meats, veggies or potatoes.
- Two cookie sheets - for pizza, cookies and more.
- One 13-inch by 9-inch oven-safe baking dish.
- One 9-inch by 9-inch ovenproof pie plate.
- One muffin pan - for muffins, condiments, making frozen treats and gelatin desserts.
- One eight or nine-inch square baking dish - for cakes, casseroles or meats.
- One loaf pan - for breads, meatloaf or small cakes.
- One or two covered microwave and freezer-safe casserole dishes in varied sizes for cooking vegetables, casseroles and leftovers.
- Two eight or nine-inch round baking pans for layer cakes.

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Spoons and Spatulas

Choose utensils to match your cookware. You do not want to scrape and scratch a non-stick surface with metal spoons or spatulas. Hard plastic and wood are suitable alternatives. Soft rubber spatulas should not be used in hot pans because they can melt.

- Buy an assortment of spoons, including slotted spoons, wooden spoons, sturdy metal spoons (if appropriate) and ladles for soups and sauces.
- You will use your spatulas all the time. You will want one that is narrow and long, and one that is short and wide. (Make sure they have sturdy handles with solid grips.)
- Soft rubber spatulas are used for scraping bowls, your food processor or folding cake batter.

Storage containers

- Keep old margarine tubs, peanut butter jars and storage bags that seal tightly for leftovers and lunches.
- Keep a few larger sizes for the freezer.
- Use a vacuum-packer that will keep your leftovers fresh in the freezer. If you shop in large quantities, vacuum-sealed bags will help keep your purchases fresh for longer periods.

Crock cookers, food processors and other small appliances will cut your time in the kitchen significantly.

- Food processors chop, grind, mix and knead in less than half the time it takes you to do it by hand.
- A blender can be the salad-lover's best friend. Use yours to whip up dressings, sauces and fruit smoothies.
- Mixers – If you bake often, invest in a heavy-duty stand mixer. If you just want to mash potatoes or bake the occasional cake, a smaller electric hand mixer will do fine.
- Crock cookers – Prepare your ingredients the night before. Throw them in the pot in the morning and come home to the aroma and flavor of a slow-cooked meal. Place the pot in a safe place – like your stovetop – to avoid burning your counter-top.
- A commercial rice steamer makes it easy to cook rice correctly and makes cleanup easy.

Extras

You don't need these items to be a healthy cook, but they will save you time and effort in the kitchen.

- *Salad spinner* – The easiest way to clean your lettuce or spinach. Removes sand and dirt and spins the leaves dry.

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- *Pepper mill* – Freshly ground pepper is always welcome on salads, soups, meats and vegetables.
- *Kitchen shears* – These make chopping meats, lettuce and herbs a breeze!
- *Tongs* – One medium-to-large metal set for meats and hot items, one medium-to-small plastic set for fruits, vegetables and salads.
- *Corkscrew* – Wine makes a great glaze for fish, chicken and vegetables. The alcohol is removed as it cooks, leaving a sweet and delicious glaze behind.
- *Bulb baster* – For basting meat and removing fat.
- *Meat fork* – Buy one with a long handle, which comes in handy for the BBQ or oven.
- *Knife Block or Tray* – Store your knives properly to prevent cuts and to keep the blades sharp.
- *Cookbook/Recipe holder* – Get your recipes off the counter and up where you can see it. This will save space if your work area is small.
- *Rolling Pin* – For rolling biscuits, cookie dough or pie crust.
- *Scale* – This will help you make accurate measurements. A kitchen scale can also help you learn proper *portion sizes*.



