



The Recovery Kitchen: How to Follow a Recipe

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We know what you're thinking: *Do I really need to learn how to follow a recipe?* We get it: Especially in early recovery, even the simplest task can feel like a monumental challenge. And with good reason: Your mind is likely occupied with fending off cravings, perhaps making your way to therapy or support meetings or simply finding a new way to spend your time now that you're not using. Or you may be experiencing sleep issues and "brain fog."

The thing is, learning to cook — which includes understanding the basics of recipes — will not only make you more comfortable in the kitchen but it will soon help alleviate stress by making it faster, simpler and less expensive for you to prepare meals at home — a skill that's vital for any stage of recovery.

The Language of Recipes



Recipe name: This describes what you will be making.



Ingredients: These are food items needed to prepare the recipe; the quantity needed; and how they are prepared (e.g., chopped, diced, minced, etc.). Hint: The ingredients are typically listed in the order in which they go into the recipe.



Directions: These are the steps required to combine and cook the ingredients and how long it will take to complete the recipe.



Servings: This is the total number of portions the recipe will make.

Six Steps for Following a Recipe

- 1 Read through the entire recipe at least twice, before doing anything else!
- 2 If the recipe is from an online source, print it out so you have it in front of you while you're cooking or baking.
- 3 If there are any techniques, cutting styles or cooking methods that are new to you or confusing, research them and make sure you are comfortable with each before you begin.

- 4 Before you start, make sure you've allowed yourself enough time to make the dish.
- 5 Think about the nutritional aspects of the recipe as you read through the ingredients (this is vital for your recovery). Is the amount of fat, salt or sugar reasonable? Are you using whole foods (versus processed foods)? You may not be able to easily discern this if you're a brand-new cook, but over time you'll learn to understand how extra fat, salt and sugar added to dishes can undermine health, weight and energy levels.
- 6 Make a grocery list of the ingredients if you need to buy anything to make the recipe.

Set Up Your *Mise en Place*

Mise en place is a French culinary phrase that means “everything in its place.” It refers to prepping all the ingredients before you start the cooking process. Though it takes a little time to get everything you need out and ready to go on the counter before you start measuring and/or preparing each ingredient for your recipe, in the end it will actually be more efficient. This process also ensures that you are organized and prepared once it’s time to cook and that you're not scrambling to find a missing ingredient when you really need it.

For example, prior to making the dish you should...



measure and cut all the vegetables.



measure out spices and dry and liquid ingredients.



set out all prepared ingredients in individual bowls or plates.

Mise en place is especially beneficial when preparing a new recipe or learning how to cook. It’s also a way to minimize stress — and the calmer you are in the kitchen, the easier it will be to follow the directions and whip up a healthy recipe to feed your recovering body and mind.

Now you're ready to get cooking!