



welcomes you

Cooking for Cognitive & Emotional Well-Being

with

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Cooking for Cognitive & Emotional Well-Being

Audience Notes

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Thank you for joining today's virtual wellness session. These notes are intended to support the recipe demonstration and provide simple takeaways you can use in everyday life.

Why Cooking Matters

Cooking is more than preparing food. It can support:

- Confidence and self-sufficiency
- Emotional grounding
- Creativity and mindfulness
- Social connection
- Daily structure and routine

Research shows cooking engages important brain functions including planning, attention, organization, memory, sequencing, and problem-solving. Cooking can also help reduce stress and bring us into the present moment.



The “Mental Health-Supportive Meal” Framework

A balanced meal does not need to be complicated. Focus on these four simple components:

1. Protein

Examples:

- Chicken
- Salmon
- Greek yogurt
- Chickpeas
- Eggs

Protein helps support:

- Stable energy
- Focus
- Reduced irritability and fatigue
- Emotional regulation

2. Fiber-Rich Foods

Examples:

- Beans
- Chickpeas
- Whole grains
- Vegetables

Fiber helps support:

- Stable blood sugar
- Sustained energy
- Mood and concentration

3. Colorful Produce

Examples:

- Bell peppers
- Greens
- Carrots
- Tomatoes



Colorful vegetables provide:

- Vitamins and minerals
- Antioxidants
- Nutrients that support brain and cognitive health

4. Healthy Fats

Examples:

- Olive oil
- Salmon
- Nuts and seeds
- Yogurt-based sauces

Healthy fats help:

- Support brain health
- Increase meal satisfaction
- Promote balanced energy



A Simple Cooking Structure:

Prep → Cook → Assemble

This simple workflow can reduce overwhelm and make home cooking feel more manageable.

Prep

Wash, chop, and organize ingredients first.

Cook

Cook proteins, vegetables, or grains in a simple sequence.

Assemble

Build bowls, plates, wraps, or salads using prepared ingredients.

This structure can:

- Reduce stress
- Improve efficiency
- Make weeknight cooking more realistic
- Help reduce “decision fatigue”

Practical Strategies for Cooking More Often

Use Repeatable Meal Templates

Simple formats make cooking easier:

- Grain bowls
- Sheet pan meals
- Stir fries
- Tacos
- Salads

Reduce Friction

Convenience can still be healthy.

Helpful shortcuts:



- Frozen vegetables
- Canned beans
- Pre-washed greens
- Rotisserie chicken
- Microwaveable grains

Prep Ingredients, Not Full Meals

Instead of preparing complete meals for the week, prep:

- Sauces
- Vegetables
- Proteins
- Grains

This gives flexibility while saving time.

Cooking & Emotional Wellness

Cooking can support emotional wellness because it:

- Engages the senses
- Encourages mindfulness
- Creates achievable goals
- Builds confidence through repetition
- Helps interrupt stress and mental overload

Cooking can also create meaningful connection with family, friends, coworkers, and community. Sharing food is one of the most natural ways people gather and care for one another.

Key Takeaways

You do not need:

- Expensive ingredients
- Advanced culinary skills
- Perfect meals
- Hours of free time

Small, consistent habits matter.

Final Reflection Cooking is one of the few activities where we plan, create, solve problems, nourish ourselves, and connect with others all at the same time. Even a simple homemade meal can become an act of care for yourself and the people around you.



One-Pan Rainbow Veggie + Chickpea Power Bowls

with Lemon-Garlic Yogurt Sauce

(Optional Chicken or Salmon)

Serves

4–6

Ingredients

Vegetables + Chickpeas

- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced
- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 small red onion, sliced
- 1 cup broccoli florets
- 1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

Protein Options

Chicken Option

- 1½ lbs boneless chicken breast or thighs
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper

Salmon Option

- 4 salmon fillets
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper
- Lemon wedges



Grain/Base Options

Choose one:

- Brown rice
- Quinoa
- Farro
- Mixed greens

Lemon-Garlic Yogurt Sauce

- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
 - 1 garlic clove, minced
 - Juice of 1 lemon
 - 1 tbsp olive oil
 - 1 tbsp chopped parsley or dill
 - Salt and pepper, to taste
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Instructions

1. Prep the Vegetables

Preheat oven to 425°F.

On a sheet pan, combine:

- bell peppers
- zucchini
- onion
- broccoli
- chickpeas

Toss with olive oil and seasonings.

2. Prepare the Protein

For Chicken

Season chicken with olive oil, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.

Add to sheet pan or cook separately in a skillet until internal temperature reaches 165°F.

For Salmon



Season salmon with olive oil, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.

Roast separately or add during the last 10–12 minutes of vegetable roasting.

3. Roast

Roast vegetables and chickpeas for 20–25 minutes, stirring halfway through.

Cook protein until fully cooked:

- Chicken: 165°F
- Salmon: flakes easily with fork

4. Make the Yogurt Sauce

Mix together:

- Greek yogurt
- garlic
- lemon juice
- olive oil
- herbs
- salt and pepper

Adjust consistency with a splash of water if desired.

Assemble the Bowls

Layer:

1. Grain or greens
2. Roasted vegetables + chickpeas
3. Chicken or salmon
4. Lemon-garlic yogurt sauce

Optional toppings:

- avocado
- feta
- pumpkin seeds
- fresh herbs
- chili flakes

Wellness Notes (Optional Talking Points)

- Protein → stable energy and focus



- Fiber-rich vegetables + chickpeas → blood sugar support
- Colorful produce → micronutrients for brain health
- Healthy fats → satisfaction and cognitive support