

MFA THESIS

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Homemade For Change:
Addressing the Barriers to Home Cooking
Among Emerging Adults for better Health,
Finances, and Well-Being

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Homemade For Change: Addressing the Barriers to Home Cooking Among Emerging Adults for Better Health, Finances, and Well-Being

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Professor Maloney, for sacrificing hours and hours of your time meeting with me, for helping me navigate my creative direction and strengths, for always pushing me to do my best, for your understanding when I felt stuck and afraid to move forward, for teaching me to use InDesign properly (oh my goodness), and for all of your guidance, feedback, encouragement, and prayers.

To Professor Harman, for your kindness, for your ideas and suggestions in the early stages of developing my recipes, for helping me with my writing errors, for your feedback with creative decisions, and for your prayers and encouragements—they helped me keep going.

To Professor Wilson, for all of your hard work, for your feedback and guidance from the beginning with my research, for inspiring me and helping me improved my illustration skills (though there's always room for growth). I'm so excited that illustration gets to play a part in my thesis. Thank you for your encouragements and prayers always—they mean a lot to me.

To my husband, Jacob, for testing the recipes with me, for the countless trips to the grocery stores, for helping me edit the written portions in my recipe book, for your feedback and creative ideas, for taking pictures of me behind the scenes, and for all of your encouragement, support, prayers, and sacrifices in the making of this project. I couldn't have done this without you.

To my parents, for all your support, encouragements, prayers, and for modeling diligence, discipline, and perseverance. You both inspire me more than you know. Thank you for believing in me, providing for me, and always being there for me.

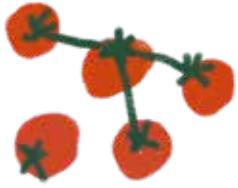
To all of my friends and family not mentioned by name (you know who you are), thank you for your love, support, and understanding as I went MIA for a year while working on this project. I am truly thankful for each of you and love you all.

Lastly but most importantly, I thank God for His grace, mercy, and loving kindness in being with me every step of the way. For equipping me with ideas, creativity, skills, and strength to complete this project from the beginning to the end. This all would not be possible without Him.



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Abstract

This study investigates how a visual approach—combining design, photography, and illustration with nutrition—can encourage home cooking. In today's fast-paced society and overabundance food culture, many emerging adults struggle to prepare meals at home. This study examines how food industry practices and cultural trends shape the eating habits of emerging adults by exploring the reasons behind the decline in home cooking and its adverse effects on health, finances, well-being, and the environment.

Although research indicates that most adults recognize that home cooking is the healthiest choice, they often do not practice it, citing time and lack of cooking knowledge as their primary obstacles. These findings also reveal a common perception that preparing healthy meals is complex and time-consuming. Some expressed that it is mostly about their organization of time, not their lack of time, that prohibits them from cooking. To identify the most effective way to overcome these barriers, the study combined case studies, visual analyses, and a comprehensive literature review. The resulting visual solution directly addresses the two primary obstacles: perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge.

Key deliverables include meal cards, a recipe book, labeled magnets, and a shopping list designed to make cooking feel accessible and helps the user build confidence and sustainable habits.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Problem

Objectives

Research Questions

Significance

Knowledge Gap





Research Problem

As modern life accelerates, many emerging adults face worsening health outcomes and increased spending linked to their dietary patterns. The convenience of ultra-processed foods, ready-made meals, and on-demand delivery services has made skipping home cooking easier than ever—but convenience comes at a cost.

Emerging adults (18-29) struggle with home cooking due to perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge, resulting in poor nutrition, financial strain, and decreased well-being.

Objectives

Everyone wants optimal health, but despite their good intentions (like New Year's resolutions), convenience foods often win over home cooking. With endless recipes online and the mental load of meal planning, busy people struggle to eat well. The overarching aim of this research is to promote home cooking, as it offers numerous benefits: it is healthier, cost-effective, enhances well-being, and is more environmentally sustainable.

The goal of the solution is not to fix the “time” issue, but to break the most common barriers (perceived time and limited cooking knowledge) by providing a solution to support people who do have some time, want to eat healthier, and are either beginners at home cooking or overwhelmed by meal planning.

TARGET AUDIENCE

While emerging adults are my primary target audience, my research solution is all-inclusive and welcomes everyone who is interested in cooking, including beginner cooks, people who need new recipe ideas, or those who are looking for some meal planning ease.

Significance

Everybody eats. Food is one of the basic necessities of life. On average, most people eat three meals a day. However, every single food we consume either helps or hurts our bodies in some way. What we consume directly impacts our health, energy, mood, sleep, well-being, and even how we think and behave. Because of this, I want to help make home cooking more accessible and be a catalyst for healthy eating. We can have all the time and money in the world, but without good health, we can't enjoy them. Eating well is a long-term investment, and good health is a true luxury. Home cooking is an essential first step.

WHAT MOTIVATED THIS RESEARCH?

My husband and I often wished someone would just tell us what to cook.

To simplify our lives, we curated easy, healthy recipes into a weekly rotation—dishes so tasty and effortless we wanted to share them.

My passion for health stems from my own struggles. I have had a bad relationship with food throughout my teen years and young adult life. Through the guidance of a certified nutrition consultant and health coaches, I restored my relationship with food and understood the concept of balancing food and intuitive eating (a non-diet approach to eating).

Still, in my early 20s, cooking often felt daunting—I lacked knowledge, inspiration, and had limited time. But through a combination of having a culinarily-creative vegan roommate and relearning family recipes throughout the years, I was inspired to cook more regularly and gradually built confidence in the kitchen. Now, I develop my own recipes and want to help others overcome the same barriers I once faced. What started as a personal health journey has turned into a passion for home cooking and nutrition.



MY PHILOSOPHY ON NUTRITION AND MITIGATING BIASES

Nutrition is deeply personal—what works for one person may not work for another. Everyone has unique dietary needs, preferences, and tolerances, making food a highly individual experience. I personally believe in intuitive and balanced eating, a belief shaped by my own journey toward a healthier relationship with food. Rather than labeling foods as “good” or “bad,” I focus on nourishment without restriction by balancing food—prioritizing whole foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, complex carbohydrates, lean proteins, and healthy fats while still allowing room for sweets and treats in moderation. As someone who is lactose intolerant, my diet is primarily dairy-free; however, I

ensure that my solution is all-inclusive and can be adapted to different dietary needs through simple substitutions.

In an era of constantly shifting diet trends and conflicting expert opinions, I recognize that many people feel overwhelmed about what to eat. Conducting a thorough literature review was crucial in helping me identify and analyze common themes, ongoing debates, and research gaps in nutrition science.

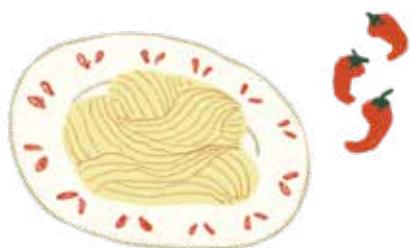
To maintain objectivity, I drew from a wide range of credible sources—including peer-reviewed studies, medical journals, books, expert blogs, surveys, and interviews—ensuring a well-rounded, scientifically-backed, and evidence-based perspective.

Knowledge Gap

While countless resources exist to promote healthy eating—from cookbooks and online recipes to meal kits and planning journals—few solutions actually address the mental fatigue of meal planning itself. The overwhelming burden of deciding what to cook remains a significant barrier that continues to discourage people from home cooking.

Furthermore, research shows that food literacy—understanding food and its health effects—is crucial for improving long-term eating habits. Cooking intervention programs that teach cooking skills have helped some people eat better, but they often reach only limited groups. There is still a growing need for food literacy pathways to health.

Lastly, there is a false perception surrounding home cooking and eating healthy—that it is difficult and time-consuming. We must reshape these perceptions while incorporating practical shortcuts and techniques to reduce cooking stress and prove that nutritious cooking can be simple, fast, and delicious.



Research Questions

- What influence do food industry practices and cultural trends exert on the dietary patterns of emerging adults?
- What is nutrition, and how does it affect physical and mental health?
- How does home cooking provide financial advantages over alternative food consumption methods?
- In what ways does home cooking improve well-being?
- How does home cooking help the environment compared to eating out or pre-packaged meals?
- What are the common barriers to cooking among emerging adults?
- What is food literacy? How can I provide culinary knowledge and improve cooking skills among emerging adults?
- What helps make home cooking less intimidating and more doable?

Chapter 2

Research

Research Rationale
Summary of Finding
Research Methods
Conclusion





Research Rationale

Research indicates that home cooking continues to decline among emerging adults as fast foods, pre-prepared meals, and ultra-processed foods grow. Since meals eaten outside of the home are typically higher in calories, fat, sugar, and sodium, while lower in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fiber, and other important nutrients, health problems such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and other chronic diseases continue to rise with the change in people's eating habits. Moreover, various studies show that foods eaten outside of homes have a greater impact on the environment and are not cost-effective in the long run. The goal of this research is to promote home cooking among emerging adults by addressing the barriers to make a positive impact on their health and well-being, ease their financial strain, and promote a more environmentally-friendly approach to eating.



Summary of Findings

INTRODUCTION

Most people know how to eat healthily and realize that it is beneficial for them to eat well. People are also aware that cooking at home is the healthier option, but why doesn't everyone do it? With demanding schedules, it is easier to grab some fast foods or heat up pre-packaged meals, so naturally, cooking gets pushed down the priority list. Emerging adults (18-29) struggle with home cooking due to perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge, resulting in poor nutrition, financial strain, and decreased well-being.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF NOT COOKING AT HOME

1. POOR NUTRITION

What is nutrition? Nutrition refers to the study of how food affects the body. What a person eats directly affects their brain, bodily function, mood, sleep, as well as their mental health. The human body is like an expensive car; it needs premium fuel. Just like how a car would run

best on premium fuel, a person's body also runs most effectively on nutritious, healthy food. .

The Food Industries

Traditional plant-based diets consumed by the poor in many countries are ideally suited to meeting nutritional needs as long as caloric intake is adequate. Once people become better off, they are observed to enter a "nutrition transition" in which they abandon traditional plant-based diets and begin eating more meat, fat, and processed foods. The result is a sharp increase in obesity and related chronic diseases. In this economy of overabundance, when food is plentiful and people can afford it, basic biological needs become less interesting and personal preference becomes the main determinant of food choices. Dr. Marion Nestle, an American molecular biologist, nutritionist, and public health advocate voiced that the food industry focuses on the development of food products that people prefer: food that tastes good. From research, most people prefer sweet and "energy-dense" foods (high in calories, fat, and sugar). In a competitive food marketplace, food companies must satisfy stockholders by encouraging more people to eat more of their



products (Nestle, 2020). This explains why convenience and processed foods are more readily available than nutritious food.

As Mark Bittman, a journalist, food writer, and bestselling author stated in “The Truth About Home Cooking,” TIME’s online article, “According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 16% of men and 13% of women ages 20 to 39 eat pizza every single day. The top source of calories for the rest of us is baked goods, followed by chicken, sugar-sweetened beverages, alcohol and, yes, pizza. Welcome to the Standard American Diet, which is often referred to as SAD, because it is” (Bittman, 2014).

How Nutrition Affects the Body

The US Department of Agriculture estimated that Americans’ daily energy intake from food away from home continues to increase. Over the years, take out, drive throughs, and pre-prepared foods make mealtimes more convenient than ever, and food delivery is as easy as a few clicks away on mobile devices. Home cooking continues to decline as convenience and fast foods grow. However, convenience comes with a cost. While some restaurants offer high-quality food, fast-food meals generally have poorer dietary quality than home-cooked meals. These fast foods and pre-prepared foods are typically high in

sugar, saturated fats, sodium, and many other toxic chemicals and preservatives. With the rise of pre-prepared and fast foods, health problems also increase.

According to the article “Association between frequency of eating away-from-home meals and risk of all-cause and cause-specific mortality” by Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, fast food and ultra-processed foods make up a significant portion of meals prepared away from home, and recent reports suggest that dining at full-service restaurants is similar to eating at fast-food chains. In line with the findings of this study, several previous studies have linked fast food consumption to a higher risk of mortality. For instance, a study in Canada found that individuals living in areas with a high density of fast-food restaurants have a 2.52 times higher risk of all-cause mortality. A meta-analysis highlighted the significant effect of an inadequate diet on the mortality and morbidity of noncommunicable diseases. It found that high sodium intake, low consumption of whole grains, and insufficient fruit intake were the top dietary risk factors for deaths globally (Yang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the authors stated, “A recent study found that people who dine out had higher levels of toxic chemicals, including phthalates, than those who ate home-cooked meals. Exposure to phthalates can

“people who dine out had higher levels of toxic chemicals, including phthalates, than those who ate home-cooked meals. Exposure to phthalates can increase risk of cardiovascular diseases” — Yang et al.

increase risk of cardiovascular diseases” (Yang et al., 2021). Phthalates are chemical compounds that can be found in most products that have contact with plastics.

Every single food item a person eats either helps or hurts the body. There is no in-between. But scientifically, how exactly does food hurt the body? According to a report published by the Global Wellness Institute, Dr. Deborah Cornah, Consultant to the Mental Health Foundation, stated, “Certain foods (and drinks) do their damage by increasing the amount of toxic ‘free-radicals’ or oxidants in the body. Oxidants are unstable molecules that are missing a critical atom—they steal from healthy cells and create potential disease by damaging the tissue that is built from essential fats, proteins, and vitamins that are required for optimum brain function....Saturated fats (e.g. butter, lard, whole milk, coconut and palm oils) and hydrogenated- or trans-fats (unsaturated vegetable oils that have been refined and hardened) are two of the worst culprits in this category” (Cornah). To put it simply, unhealthy food, especially those high in saturated and trans-fats (butter, whole milk, vegetable oils, fried food, etc.),

causes the little thieves “free-radicals” or “oxidants” to steal from good cells in the body. When they steal, they damage important things that the brain and body need to function properly, and over time, this damage can lead to diseases. Since meals eaten outside the home are typically higher in calories, fat, and sodium while lower in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nutrients like fiber and antioxidants, regularly dining out is linked to an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases (Du et al., 2021).

Moreover, the food a person eats impacts their sleep quality. This is because food relates directly to serotonin, a key hormone that helps promote good sleep. Sleep has become a cultural sacrificial lamb. People don’t take their lack of sleep seriously because fatigue is more of a behind-the-scenes health threat—one that has a creeping effect on their bodies. Nonetheless, the risks associated with lack of sleep is great. All day long, the body is put through a series of cellular stresses (working, exercising, functioning). To maintain itself and recover from these cellular stresses, the body needs a repair crew. While a person

“Studies have shown that the gut functions as a second brain—it influences one’s sleep, appetite, mood, and even behavior.”

sleeps, the body repairs muscles, grows and strengthens neurons in the brain, and fortifies the body’s damaged cells. These cells can’t do their jobs optimally unless the body is shut down and in deep sleep. Lack of sleep can contribute to immune problems, memory issues, higher stress levels, and even obesity.

One of the worst effects of sleep deprivation is a high inflammatory response, causing the immune system to mistakenly attack healthy cells. This increases the risk of conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis (Cleveland Clinic). In “6 Foods That Help You Sleep,” Cleveland Clinic provides insights on how certain foods can help improve sleep. Research indicates that eating foods that are low in saturated fats and sugar can lead to better sleep quality. Complex carbohydrates, fiber, lean protein, heart-healthy fats, magnesium-rich foods, herbs, and healthy snacks in moderation can help improve one’s sleep quality, which promotes better health and wellness (Cleveland Clinic).

How Nutrition Affects Mental Health

Not only does food impact one’s physical health, but also one’s mental health as well. Mental health refers to a person’s overall emotional, psychological, and social well-being, which impacts how they think, feel, and act. The nutritional psychiatry field is recognizing more and more of a correlation between food and mood. Studies have shown that the gut functions as a second brain—it influences one’s sleep, appetite, mood, and even behavior. It is no wonder that obesity and mental health issues are increasing as dietary habits shift from home-cooked meals to more commonly consumed, nutrient-deficient, and calorie-dense convenience foods. Anxiety and depression are the top two leading mental health issues today among emerging adults, and food plays a role in that. According to “Nutritional Psychiatry: Your Brain on Food,” Harvard Health Dr. Eva Selhub stated, “Multiple studies have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and impaired brain function—and even

a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression" (Selhub, 2022).

Today, the field of nutritional psychiatry is finding many consequences and correlations between not only what a person eats, how they feel, and how they behave, but also the kinds of bacteria that live in their gut. This explains how the digestive system affects emotions. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates sleep, appetite, mood, and pain, is mainly (about 95%) produced in the gut, which contains millions of neurons. The function of these neurons and serotonin production is influenced by the billions of "good" bacteria in the intestinal microbiome.

The good bacteria also protect the body from the "bad" bacteria and inflammation. This means more good food = more "good" bacteria. Studies have shown that people who eat "traditional" diets (such as the Mediterranean or Japanese diet) when compared to a typical "Western" diet have a 25% to 35% lower risk of depression (Selhub, 2022). This is because traditional diets are usually high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, fish, and seafood, and they contain only modest amounts of lean meats and dairy. The good bacteria activate neural pathways that travel directly between the gut and the brain.

Moreover, cooking is considered a mindful activity that can redirect and refocuses a person's mind, especially when they are "stuck in the rut." Cooking also fosters creativity and a sense of accomplishment. One might also benefit from

cooking for mental health if he or she struggles with excessive screen time or finds it difficult to set boundaries between work and home life.

2. FINANCIAL STRAIN

Other than poor nutrition, eating processed foods and meals away from home regularly can also hurt one's wallet in the long run. Eating out is not necessarily a bad thing, but cooking at home more can help save some money. MinnPost, an independent nonprofit news organization, stated that various surveys have been conducted across the United States on people's eating habits. One of them shows that the average American eats out five to six times a week. Another survey reports that the average American spends over \$2,500 a year eating out (Akubue, 2024). That amounts to around \$200 per month spent on dining out in addition to groceries, bills, and other expenses.

Priceonomics, a company that specializes in data-backed content marketing, released an article on Forbes titled "Here's How Much Money You Save By Cooking At Home." Using data from their client Wellio—a platform that analyzes recipes and matches ingredients to local grocery items—they compared the costs of home cooking, meal kits, and restaurant delivery. Their findings revealed that ordering delivery averages over \$20 per serving, making it nearly three times pricier than meal kits and five times more expensive than cooking from scratch (Priceonomics, 2018). When dining out, most people typically choose meat-based dishes as their main course. Research indicates that one can save the most money

“At over \$20 per serving on average, a restaurant delivered meal is almost three times as expensive as a meal kit and five times as expensive as cooking at home from scratch.”

—Priceonomics

by cooking meat-base meals at home, such as dishes with beef, pork, or chicken. Restaurants tend to charge a lot for these types of meals, and when one factors in delivery fees, the cost can easily exceed \$20 per person. Other popular menus are pasta-based dishes like Broccoli Alfredo, Pad Thai, Pasta Bolognese, and Soba Noodles, which are charged at “entree” prices at restaurants. These dishes can be easily made at home to save 80-90% per serving. Additionally, meal delivery kits are still quite a lot more expensive than cooking from scratch because they charge a premium for the convenience of pre-assembled and pre-portioned ingredients. As stated in the article, “Vegetable and pasta-based meals like Cheese Pizza, Mac & Cheese, or a Cauliflower/Quinoa bowl cost

around \$1 per serving. Meal kits, on the other hand, charge around \$12 per serving when including delivery fees” (Priceonomics, 2018).

Studies also show that fast foods and processed foods are usually perceived as cheaper. In HelpGuide’s article, “Eating Well on a Budget,” the authors expressed that “...even the ‘\$1 deals’ at fast-food restaurants can end up costing \$20-30 for the whole family when adding drinks and fries. A healthy beef stew or roasted chicken with vegetables can cost a fraction and provide leftovers as well” (Robinson and Smith, 2024). On the other hand, frozen meals, which typically cost between \$2-\$7, include the price of ingredients, manufacturing, labor, packaging,



transportation, and refrigeration in their cost per serving.

When considering all of the different food options such as pre-packaged meals, fast foods, meal delivery kits, food delivery, and dining out, home cooked meals are the most cost effective overall. Eating home cooked foods a few more times a week can make a difference on one's financial strain, especially for those who have to work with a tight budget.

3. DECREASED WELL-BEING

Well-being is a broad concept used in many fields to describe a state of wellness, health, and happiness. Although certain aspects of well-being appear universal, the way it is described in research varies significantly. In "Well-Being Is More than Happiness and Life Satisfaction: A Multidimensional Analysis of 21 Countries - Health and Quality of Life Outcomes," BioMed Central's research article, the authors define well-being as the combination of feeling good and functioning well, the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships. It is a sustainable condition that allows the individual or population to develop and thrive. The term subjective well-being is synonymous with positive mental health. The World Health Organization defines positive mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities,

can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (Ruggeri et al., 2020).

In this particular review, "well-being" will refer to the state of being physically and mentally healthy, content, and happy, feeling good, and living well. Because a person's overall well-being is made up of many aspects—physical, emotional, social, and societal, among many others—it is not surprising that a person's way of living will directly impact their overall sense of well-being. Busy schedules, limited time, and lack of cooking knowledge and skills often cause emerging adults to struggle with preparing meals at home. This results in unhealthy eating habits, financial stress from overspending on food, and a sense of losing control, all of which negatively impact their overall well-being.

How Does Home Cooking Improve Wellbeing?

To improve one's well-being, adjusting one's eating habits and food choices is the first step. Home cooking improves a person's health and wellness because it promotes better nutrition. A person has more control over what they eat as well as the food portion when they cook at home. They are also more likely to eat a higher amount of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, fiber, and heart-healthy fats. Eating healthier and functioning better will lead to improved mood, sleep quality, mental health, and well-being.

Mindfulness is another effective way to enhance well-being. Practicing mindful eating can be a helpful addition to one's eating habits, promoting better physical and mental health. Eating mindfully—focusing all your senses and being present as you eat—can help increase a person's enjoyment of food, help them acknowledge how each type of food makes them feel, and naturally, lead them to choose healthier foods that feel good to their bodies. Being mindful during mealtimes can give a person a break from daily tasks, ease stress and anxiety, change one's relationship with food, and improve digestion. As Lawrence Robinson and Dr. Jeanne Segal, the authors of HelpGuide's article "Mindful Eating," mentioned, "When you eat mindfully and become more attuned to your body, you can start to feel how different foods affect you physically, mentally, and emotionally. And that can make it much easier to make the switch to healthier food choices" (Robinson and Segal, 2024).

People often mistake feelings of anxiety, stress, boredom, or loneliness as hunger, and they emotionally eat to try to fill the void. Mindful eating helps people become more aware of when they might be practicing emotional eating (Robinson and Segal, 2024). In "Feeding minds: the impact of food on mental health" by the Mental Health Foundation, research indicates that some foods "trick the brain" into making people feel better by temporarily promoting a neurotransmitter that they lack as they consume them. For example, caffeine, nicotine, and chocolate contribute to this. Because of the quick

"boost" that makes people feel good, they crave more of those products (Cornah, M.D.).

In general, a craving can signal something is out of balance, such as dehydration, vitamin or mineral deficiency, stress, or poor sleep. When one is aware that they are emotionally eating, it is easier for them to notice what might actually be causing them to feel the way they feel and manage those feelings correctly. For example, instead of quickly grabbing a sugary snack to ease one's stress, it is helpful stop, breathe, think about what the actual cause of stress is, and manage the source of stress—such as organizing and re-prioritizing their time. Although, mindful eating is not about being perfect, always choosing the healthiest foods, or never eating on the go. It's not about strict rules like counting calories or banning certain foods. It is okay to still eat some snacks in moderation and balance one's food. As the authors mention, "Think of mindful eating like exercise: every little bit counts. The more you can do to slow down, focus solely on the process of eating, and listen to your body, the greater satisfaction you'll experience from your food and the greater control you'll have over your diet and nutrition habits" (Robinson and Segal, 2024).

As people manage their time better, eat better, feel better, and take greater control of their finances and their life, they will feel a sense of accomplishment, thrive, and increase their overall sense of well-being.

HOME COOKING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Between homemade spaghetti with meat sauce that yields 6 servings versus 6 boxes of frozen spaghetti, it is clear that the latter option requires more packaging and creates more waste. Home cooking is overall more environmentally friendly than the ready-made options (especially frozen meals that have to be heated up in the oven) because of less packaging, avoidance of meal manufacturing, reduced refrigeration, and a lower amount of waste in the life cycle of the homemade meal. The type of refrigeration used in the supply chain affects factors like global warming and ozone layer depletion, while packaging contributes to global warming, fossil fuel depletion, and human toxicity. In “Life cycle environmental impacts of convenience food: Comparison of ready and home-made meals” by the Journal of Cleaner Production, data reveals that potentials for global warming and human toxicity are as much as 35% lower in homemade meals, and eutrophication (rapid growth of algae that harms water and ecosystem), photochemical smog (air pollution), and ozone layer depletion are up to 3 times lower (Schmidt Rivera et al., 2014).

The worst option for most impacts is the frozen-made meal with frozen ingredients that

is heated in an electric oven. For some of the impacts, how consumers choose to heat their meals is the key factor that sets different ready-made meal options apart. For example, cooking the frozen meal in an electric oven has a 6.5 times higher GWP (Global Warming Potential) than microwaving the chilled meal. However, if necessary for the ready-made meal options considered in the study, the lowest impacts are found for the frozen meal prepared from fresh ingredients and heated in a microwave. This is due to the higher usage and leakage of refrigerants during storage of the chilled meals at a retailer because they are kept in open refrigerators, while frozen meals are stored in closed cabinets (Schmidt Rivera et al., 2014).

The most environmentally friendly option is home cooking using a gas stove or microwave. Nevertheless, reducing post-consumer waste is still one of the most significant behavioral changes needed in reducing the environmental impacts of food. Therefore, it is also important to inform emerging adults on how to properly and effectively meal-prep, store, reuse, and reheat leftovers alongside cooking knowledge to reduce food waste.



“It’s mostly being too lazy to cook, not that I don’t have time” (W, 23 years).

BARRIERS TO HOME COOKING AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

1. PERCEIVED TIME CONSTRAINTS

According to various studies, the most common barrier to home cooking is time. The world today is a whirlwind of activity and busyness, driven by technology and progress. Convenience and speed are sought after, and efficiency is key. In this fast-paced society, multitasking has become the norm, and everything is “on the go,” including people’s mealtimes. It is not unusual to see someone scarfing down their lunch at their desk or swinging by a drive-through for something they can quickly eat while driving, or even worse, grabbing a big sugary drink or blended coffee because they simply have no time to eat. Moreover, frozen and pre-prepared meals grew in popularity at the boom of television. Since then, those meals have been the go-to dinner. In one study, qualitative research was done on the university students’ perception of healthy cooking and barriers to eating healthily. Research shows that although eating healthily was viewed as an important aspect of health and well-being

for most of the students interviewed, they did not usually do so.

Generally, the diet of these students is rich in sweetened drinks and processed foods and low in fruits, vegetables, and legumes. Time was one of the main barriers to healthy eating, as they explained that healthy cooking requires much more time for food preparation and processing than the preparation of processed or pre-cooked food (Vélez-Toral et al, 2020). Most students in the study agreed that healthy cooking involves three main things: (1) a complicated process; (2) healthy ingredients; and (3) use of healthy techniques. Since cooking in general is seen as a step-by-step process, healthy cooking is seen as even more complex, complicated, and time consuming. Because of the “perceived time” necessary for cooking, the person’s willingness to cook is affected—or, to put it simply, it makes them feel “too lazy” to cook.

“It’s mostly being too lazy to cook, not that I don’t have time” (W, 23 years).

“I think it’s mostly about organization and time and also not feeling like making something healthy, or stopping to think about what you’re going to eat to make it healthy” (M, 20 years).

(Representative quotes from ‘It’s important but, on what level?: Healthy cooking meanings

and barriers to healthy eating among university students." Nutrients)

To many, it is like a juggle game between the two—balancing time and health—sacrificing one at the expense of the other. Among various studies, time seems to be the biggest barrier to home cooking. However, interestingly, the average time necessary to eat out is 45–60 minutes/meal, the average time it takes for food delivery is 35 minutes/meal, and the average time it takes to cook is 53 min/day. This means that part of the problem lies in people's misguided assumptions that healthy food recipes are complex and time-consuming. Especially when meal planning is added on top of cooking, the whole task just seems too overwhelming to even think about.

This led to the question of, "How, then, can people's perception of cooking be changed?" In an international research journal, *Appetite*, research shows that people have different ideas about what cooking means, and it's not the same for everyone. Younger individuals are more likely to include convenience foods in their definition of homemade, whereas older individuals tend to emphasize 'cooking from scratch,' using fresh ingredients and traditional methods when defining homemade meals. This highlights the importance of public health messages about healthy eating to consider these varying perspectives. By doing so, these messages might inspire people to cook more often. For example, de-emphasizing scratch cooking may encourage cooking among those who report lack of

confidence or negative attitudes towards cooking. Encouraging emerging adults to incorporate some healthy convenience foods, such as frozen vegetables or picking up a rotisserie chicken as a part of their meal, can help cooking feel more manageable. As expressed by the authors, "Messages to reach this group might focus on incorporating healthy convenience foods (such as pre-cut and portioned vegetables, frozen vegetables and proteins, and ready-made sauces) into the preparation of healthy meals as it would be less time consuming" (Wolfson et al, 2016). Using some of those healthy alternatives in their cooking is still better than eating fast foods or ultra-processed meals. Even if they only cook once or twice a week, it is still slow but steady progress towards better nutrition.

2. LIMITED CULINARY KNOWLEDGE

The second biggest barrier to home cooking is limited culinary knowledge. Food literacy—the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions about food and its impact on health—plays a key role in shaping nutrition choices (Silva et al, 2023). Research highlights that higher food literacy is a key factor in maintaining a healthy diet. A longitudinal study by Dutch researchers found that individuals with good cooking skills in early adulthood were more likely to consume fruits and vegetables regularly and faced fewer challenges in preparing healthy meals a decade later.

“Multiple studies have shown that those who have lower level of culinary knowledge and skills are more likely to eat foods prepared away from home as well as processed and pre-packaged foods.”

Cooking skills refer to the confidence, mindset, and ability to use personal knowledge to carry out kitchen-related tasks, such as meal planning, grocery shopping, and preparing various types of food, whether fresh or processed. The development of cooking skills is crucial for fostering healthy eating habits because homemade food encourages greater fruit and vegetable consumption and increases the overall nutritional value of the meals.

Multiple studies have shown that those who have lower level of culinary knowledge and skills are more likely to eat foods prepared away from home as well as processed and pre-packaged foods. This lack of knowledge has led to unprecedented rates of obesity and diabetes, which often lead to other health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and kidney disease (Silva et al., 2023). According to “Nutrition and Food Literacy: Framing the challenges to health communication,” the researchers addressed that, “In a world where processed and fast foods are often more convenient and accessible than nutritious options, having food literacy can make

a big difference in a person’s overall health and well-being” (Rees et al., 2022).

Some people may not recognize that their diet is unhealthy, often due to their lack of awareness about nutrition or because their eating habits have become so ingrained in their daily lives that they don’t give them much thought. For others, they do recognize that they are not eating the healthiest, and they want to eat better, but their eating habits are hard to break because they are addicted to certain types of food, or they just do not know where to begin to implement change. Every day, people worldwide feel confused about what to eat for health. People look for science-based information but struggle with the vast amount of information and do not know what to believe. People feel that scientists do not agree with each other and are constantly changing their minds (Silva et al., 2023). Lack of culinary knowledge and skills can also cause some people to run out of meal ideas, leading them to repeatedly cook the same thing. This can result in food boredom and in them reverting to less healthy food choices.

To address these issues, “there is a growing need for food literacy pathways to health. This includes education and training programs that



provide people with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to make informed food choices and to access, prepare, and cook nutritious meals,” as stated in *Frontiers in Nutrition* (Rees et al., 2022).

Moreover, people are overcomplicating the idea of cooking. Mark Bittman stated in TIME’s online article “The Truth about Home Cooking” that the idea of cooking has been overcomplicated by society and culture. Society’s obsession with food is evident in constant TV shows, magazines, and social media accounts showcasing elaborate dishes. While food has become a cultural performance, this focus has negatively impacted people’s relationship with cooking. With the rise of extravagant ingredients and expensive kitchens, many people feel like an outsider, leading to a decline in home cooking (Bittman, 2014).

What can be done to break this barrier, then? Research shows that the level of enjoyment of cooking is related to the level of confidence one has in their cooking skills. In a 7-week food literacy cooking program using a quasi-experimental controlled intervention trial, participants in the intervention group showed improvements in cooking satisfaction, enjoyment, and

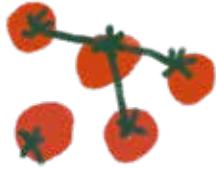
ability—factors linked to healthier eating habits (Rees et al., 2022).

When someone feels confident about something, it is usually because they know they can do that particular thing well. However, for most people, in order to become good at something, practice is required. Learning simple recipes, cooking with friends or family, and experimenting with flavors can help make home cooking more enjoyable for those who lack confidence in the kitchen. As Bittman wrote, “Cooking with other people—spouses, kids, friends, and extended family—can be an immensely satisfying and relaxing social activity, with the added benefit of having something delicious to eat when you’re done” (Bittman, 2014). Going grocery shopping with a roommate, splitting cooking tasks with one’s significant other, or sharing meals with family can make home cooking much more meaningful and fun. Even if a recipe fails miserably, having someone to laugh with about it can make the activity feel much less discouraging. Similar to exercise, cooking is a muscle—the more someone cooks, the more skilled they become, and over time, it will feel natural and effortless.

CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

From various studies, research indicates that home cooking continues to decline among emerging adults as the number of convenience, ultra-processed, and fast food grows. Health problems and chronic diseases continue to rise with their eating habits. However, with demanding schedules, emerging adults are struggling to cook at home due to perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge, resulting in poor nutrition, financial strain, and decreased well-being. To break these barriers, it's important to change their misconceptions about cooking and provide them with practical, easy-to-learn cooking skills.





Research Methods

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using secondary research sources such as academic journals, online articles, books, interviews, and surveys to identify common themes, theories, debates, and knowledge gaps in the field to ensure a deep understanding of the importance of home cooking as well as thoroughly analyze the barriers that prevent it. Additional research methods included case studies and visual analyses.

CASE STUDIES

A case study is a research strategy involving in-depth investigation of single events or instances in context, using multiple sources of research evidence. For this thesis, case studies were conducted to examine existing campaigns, individuals, products, and businesses that aim to solve the same or similar problem (encourage home cooking or a call to action). This research method helped identify both successful strategies for potential adaptation and common pitfalls to avoid in developing the proposed solution.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

A visual analysis is the process of examining and interpreting the visual elements of a piece of art, architecture, or design to understand its meaning, aesthetics, and cultural context. It involves identifying and exploring characteristics like color, line, shape, texture, and composition to understand how they contribute to the overall message and impact. In *Research for designers: A guide to methods and practices*, the author mentioned, “There is an underlying connection between visuals and viewers, and objects and users. Taking images, forms, and objects seriously involves thinking about how the viewers and users are positioned in relation to the image, the form, or the object—and whether this might be a historical, cultural, commercial, or philosophical placement” (Muratovski 210). Through conducting visual analyses, I gained valuable insights into the content and messaging of the visual solutions, their intended audiences, how people consume the visuals, their cultural significance and context, and key factors contributing to their effectiveness.

CASE STUDY 1: MISFITS MARKET

Abhi Ramesh is the CEO and Founder of Misfits Market. The inspiration came when he was apple picking one day and noticed that there were a bunch of apples that had fallen from the tree. He later asked the farmer about what happens to those fallen apples and found out that there were thousands of them that the farm would store in a cooler, tried to sell at the farmer's market, and then the rest would get composted, tossed, or fed to the pigs. Ramesh was shocked that all of that waste was happening at a single small farm—it made him think about what could be happening at larger farms across the country.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Misfits Market is an online grocer that works directly with farmers and food makers to rescue oddly-shaped produce (too big, too small, scarred, discolored, etc.), as well as takes in surplus, short-dated, and outdated-packaging items, and sells them at a discounted price. This benefits farmers, prevents food waste, helps save the environment, and provides customers

with access to healthy food at a more affordable price.

PROJECT OUTCOME

Misfits went from being a small start-up to a billion-dollar business in only three years. The combination of their unique business model, commitment to sustainability, and focus on customer satisfaction makes the brand successful (Eliza, 2023). They rescue, on average, 500,000 pounds of food every week, and conserve about 196.79 gallons of water in every order. Misfits Market also donated over 6 million pounds of food to 60+ food bank and pantry partners as well as 1.5 million meals to Feeding America. They are creating a food waste awareness movement by educating and mobilizing people through their digital platforms. Misfits Market leverages its website and social media to share practical content about reducing waste—from produce storage hacks to innovative uses for food scraps and engaging recipes—while highlighting their sustainability initiatives and product offerings. To amplify their reach, they strategically partner with complementary brands and influencers across social media channels.

VISUAL ANALYSIS 1: MISFITS MARKET



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.1

BRAND IDENTITY AND TARGET AUDIENCE

Misfits Market's distinctive brand identity features a vibrant primary yellow, a bold, chunky serif typeface, and high-contrast photography with dramatic lighting. Their iconic packaging features a simple cardboard box with a big stylized "misshapen" golden apple graphic and a prominent "Misfits Market" logotype. Their target demographics are Gen Z and older millennials (ages 25-49), particularly consumers who are more environmentally-conscious.

Misfits Market often presents their "ugly" produce in a positive light by combining fun and colorful photographs of the oddly shaped produce with lighthearted messages (such as calling discarded baby broccoli stalks "broccoli niños" or calling rejected oversized produce "jumbo"). A consistent visual strategy I've noticed involves featuring a hand holding a single piece of produce. This intentional framing (as opposed to displaying multiple items) effectively emphasizes the significance of each individual fruit or vegetable while creating a more striking visual composition.

A WIDER CULTURAL CONTEXT AND AN EFFECTIVE VISUAL SOLUTION

In today's increasingly inclusive society that values diversity and acceptance, Misfits Market's core mission of rescuing "imperfect" produce cleverly aligns with broader cultural movements celebrating uniqueness and challenging conventional standards of perfection. Their business

model and visual solution effectively highlights this cultural shift by framing misshapen fruits and vegetables not as rejects, but as natural variations worthy of appreciation—a powerful marketing narrative that resonates with contemporary values of inclusivity and sustainability.

The brand's visual identity exudes a playful, energetic personality through its cohesive aesthetic: vibrant food photography, a signature bold yellow hue, thick sans-serif typography, and an inviting warm color scheme working harmoniously to create this distinctive character. Misfits Market's visual identity strategically merges two key aesthetics: a functional, minimalist approach that appeals to millennial preferences, and a bold, expressive style featuring distinctive, quirky elements that resonate with Gen Z.

CASE STUDY 2: SOMETHING NUTRITIOUS

Gal Shua-Haim is a registered dietitian, social media influencer, food blogger, and recipe developer. She is the face behind Something Nutritious, her website and social media name. From an early age, Gal developed a deep fascination with food and how it affects the body. This curiosity evolved into a passionate pursuit of her academic journey in Nutritional Sciences (BS, MS) and dietetics certification. Over the years, she learned that there is no one diet approach that fits all. Each person needs to follow a way of eating that is sustainable for them, their body, and their lifestyle. Gal has an “all foods fit” approach when it comes to nutrition—meaning she avoids labeling food as “good” or “bad” but believes that all foods can fit into a balanced lifestyle. Her overall goal is to simplify people’s lives in the kitchen by showing them that eating healthy can be easy without compromising taste.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Gal’s goal is to provide people with easy and nutritious recipes online through her website and social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

Her website has a wide variety of nutritious recipes that can be filtered by personal dietary preferences such as dairy-free, egg-free, gluten-free, vegan, etc. The recipes can also be filtered by practical categories such as course type, cooking method, cuisine, and seasonal.

Being an Israeli and also being born and raised in New York enables her to share authentic recipes for Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashana, Passover, Hanukkah, and Shabbat, while also putting creative twists on American classics like non-traditional Thanksgiving dishes. On her website, she presents her recipes in an exceptionally user-friendly format, featuring straightforward ingredient lists accompanied by clear, step-by-step cooking instructions with photos that make cooking accessible to everyone.

PROJECT OUTCOME

Gal has always loved experimenting in the kitchen and creating new recipes. She started her Instagram account in 2014, followed by her blog in 2020. Her goal has always been to show others that eating healthy doesn’t need to be complicated. She quickly realized how many people were looking for the same thing she was—simple, nutritious recipes. As of 2025, she has over 560k followers on Instagram and over 300k followers on TikTok.

Furthermore, Something Nutritious was listed as one of the best food TikTok accounts on Russh, an independent international fashion magazine showcasing innovators in fashion, beauty, and the arts. Russh’s website also covers other topics like culture, home, travel, and well-being.

What started as a hobby has now turned into a community of people with whom she gets to share her love for cooking and baking and inspire them to eat healthy and feel nourished. Gal also works one-on-one with clients to help



Figure 2.1

them shift their mindset around food and create better eating habits. Something Nutritious is a food blog with an inviting aesthetic and a very well-executed UX/UI design. While there are no specific age demographics, Gal primarily targets individuals who seek simple, nutritious recipes. Her goal is to show others that eating healthy can be easy and inspire them to get creative in the kitchen. Gal's content appeals to people who are more health-conscious and are interested in cooking. As a food blogger, recipe developer, and a social media influencer, Gal's visual strategy centers on digital platforms. a wider cultural context

VISUAL ANALYSIS 2: SOMETHING NUTRITIOUS

The color choices and the overall brand identity reflect the feeling of freshness, nutrition, peace,

and wellness. The color green in general is often associated with vitality, growth, health, nature, and harmony. In *GREEN: COLOR PSYCHOLOGY, SYMBOLISM AND MEANING*, Hailey van Braam, the founder of Color Psychology, stated, “for food-related businesses, green can represent freshness, organic quality, and natural ingredients” (Van Braam, 2025).

The two shades of green that Something Nutritious uses as accent colors are sage green and dark green. Sage green gives a sense of calm, balance, and freshness, while the darker green gives a sense of groundedness and stability. Ivory, which is the main color, evokes feelings of peace, tranquility, timelessness, and cleanliness. Lastly, light beige is often used to create a sense of sophistication, elegance, and reliability in branding (Van Braam, 2025).

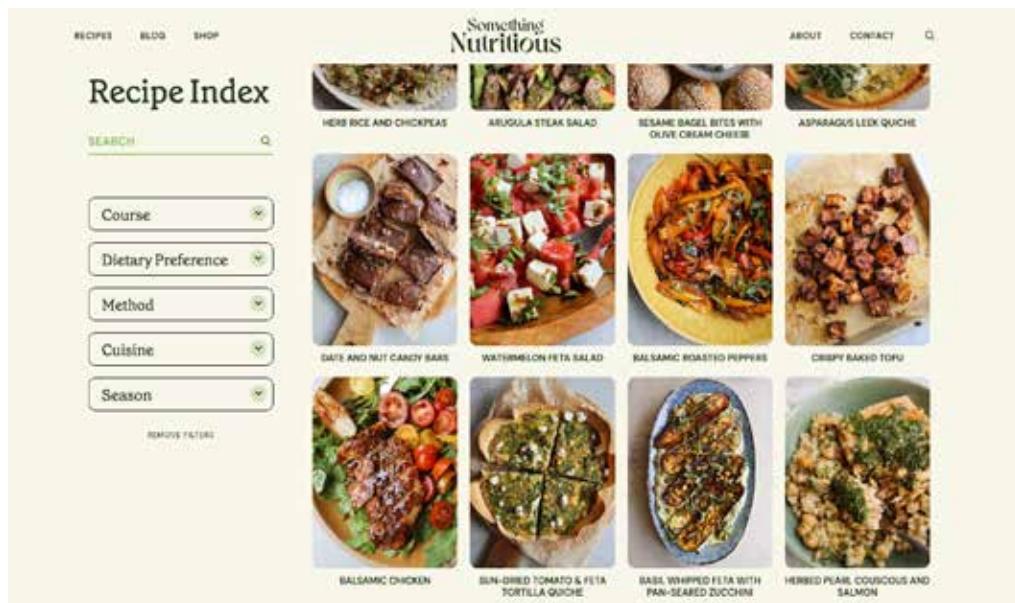


Figure 2.2

VISUAL CONTENT

Gal designs her Something Nutritious blog content thoughtfully, prioritizing clarity and simplicity. Her recipes use basic ingredients and are easy to follow, with complex ones featuring bullet-point ingredient lists and step-by-step photo guides. Most recipes are streamlined into 4-5 steps, each explained with only 1-2 sentences. Other simple recipes only have a few numbered steps.

Being a registered dietitian, Gal intentionally avoids sharing “What I Eat In A Day” posts or “calorie counts” on all of her platforms—content

popular among many influencers—due to her awareness of their potential harm. She recognizes that these posts may trigger individuals with eating disorders, disordered eating patterns, or those in recovery. More importantly, she aims to prevent followers from making unhealthy comparisons about food quantities or choices, instead fostering a positive, judgment-free space around eating habits.

Gal explained that while she personally follows a pescatarian diet (plant-based with seafood) and eats gluten and dairy, she deliberately creates inclusive recipes to accommodate diverse dietary needs. Her recipes feature

meat-containing dishes alongside gluten-free, dairy-free, vegan, and allergy-friendly options, ensuring accessibility for people with food sensitivities or specific dietary preferences.

Because of her intentional and inclusive content, user-friendly recipe instructions, and warm and welcoming brand identity, these aesthetic choices led to a successful visual solution.

CASE STUDY 3: THE “I DON’T WANT TO COOK” BOOK

Alyssa Brantley is the writer of The “I Don’t Want to Cook” Book and the face behind Everyday Maven, a content business and food blog.

Alyssa believes that being busy shouldn’t mean sacrificing delicious, wholesome meals. Her motto, ‘Whole Foods, Half the Time,’ reflects her passion for creating nourishing recipes that take half the time to make.

Alyssa and her husband lived a busy urban lifestyle, eating out many nights every week. But that on-the-go life was impossible to maintain with the birth of her first son. After having their son, Alyssa decided to join Weight Watchers to lose the baby weight. Surprised by the lack of resources featuring clean, whole, organic foods for healthy weight loss, she started developing her own recipes and shared them on her website, Everyday Maven—a space where Whole Foods and Weight Watchers come together. Through her site, Alyssa connected with fellow

Weight Watchers members, building an audience of the program’s followers.

PROJECT SUMMARY

After Alyssa lost weight, however, she realized she didn’t want to build her business around a diet. Everyday Maven shifted to focusing on recipes that feature healthy whole food ingredients (Brantley, n.d.).

Channeling her creativity, Alyssa wrote her first cookbook, The “I Don’t Want To Cook” Book, released in July 2022. As both a mother and entrepreneur, she intimately understands the challenge of balancing a hectic schedule while still needing to put food on the table. The book features 100 nutritious, flavor-packed recipes that can be made in 15 minutes or less, designed for anyone who doesn’t feel like cooking, whether it’s after a long day or simply due to a lack of inspiration.

PROJECT OUTCOME

The ‘I Don’t Want to Cook’ Book stands out by delivering simple, flavorful, and wholesome recipes that require minimal cooking time, little to no prep, and no extra visits to the grocery store. The book also includes tips for cooking shortcuts and substitutes for common ingredients—suitable for busy families, beginner cooks, time-crunched students, or anyone who dreads cooking after a long day. The book received hundreds of positive reviews and has a 4.3 global rating on Amazon.

VISUAL ANALYSIS 3: BAGGU

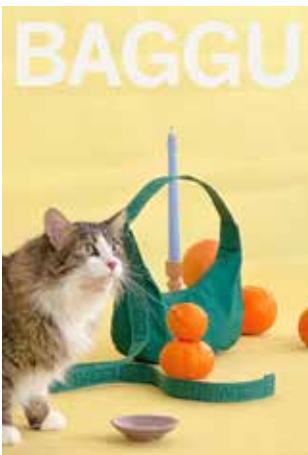


Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4



Figure 3.5



Figure 3.6

BAGGU is a design-driven brand celebrated for its vibrant aesthetic and positive ethos. The brand's logo features a clean, all-caps, sans-serif typeface, reflecting its versatile approach. Their website design keeps things understated with a cream-off-white background and black text, ensuring the colorful products take center stage. The brand's two main typography choices are Studio Pro (a sleek sans-serif used for the

logo and web text) and GT Alpina (a contemporary serif that adds expressive contrast).

The brand's best-selling item is its reusable shopping bag, The Standard Baggu, which mimics the shape of a classic plastic grocery bag (Figure 3.5). Made from recycled nylon, the reusable bag comes in vibrant colors and playful prints featuring whimsical designs like fruits, vegetables, flowers, everyday items, animals, and occasional funky abstract patterns.

Beyond these, the brand offers a wide range of bags—including backpacks, crossbody bags, pouches, and leather purses—as well as other lifestyle products such as picnic blankets, socks, towels, keychains, and bag charms. Among their top sellers are the Duck Bag (a versatile zip tote with both long and short straps, wearable as a crossbody or handheld bag) and the trendy Crescent Bag (a sleek, compact, crescent-shaped crossbody).

TARGET AUDIENCE AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

BAGGU's primary target audience are mostly Gen Z and younger millennials (ages 25-34). The brand communicates its aesthetic largely through physical products and digital channels, particularly its website and social media platforms. BAGGU has gained popularity among GenZ, especially on Instagram and TikTok. Post.script, a Woman-owned gift shop in San Francisco, stated, "TikTokers have been obsessing over the brand. 'What's in my BAGGU' videos have been taking over the platform with users capturing just how much stuff they've managed to stash in their tote" ("Everything you Need To Know About Baggu Bags", 2024). The brand has created a fashion culture with its versatility, trendy design, and affordable price—with the Baby BAGGU, starting at \$12, taking GenZ's closets by storm. They also launch seasonal collections and limited edition of prints such as NASA, The Met, Hello Kitty, and Peanuts collections, and collaborate with brands and

artists like J.CREW, West Elm, Laura Ashley, Simone Johnson, Keith Haring, and Sandy Liang. BAGGU bags are also available through Urban Outfitters, another one of Gen Z's favorite lifestyle retailers.

Despite its green ethos, Baggu faces criticism that its exclusive launches and collector culture promote overconsumption and undermines the brand's sustainability (Cohn, 2023).

According to Kantar, a marketing data and analytics business, Millennials gravitate toward brands that support their personal growth, curiosity, and social connections. Successful brands cater to this demographic by offering products aligned with their lifestyles—infusing joy and novelty into their offerings while using authentic, aspirational messaging that mirrors their optimistic outlook. Above all, Millennials value meaningful experiences over material possessions. Gen Z, by contrast, prioritizes action over words. Brands that resonate with this generation take tangible steps to address social and environmental challenges while providing products that foster joy, self-expression, and mental well-being ("How Well Do You Know Gen Z and Millennials?", 2023). Baggu's enduring appeal lies in its fusion of sustainability, fashion-forward design, and a strong community connection fostered through social media—the brand has successfully captured the loyalty of both Millennials and Gen Z for nearly two decades.

Conclusion

Studies show that emerging adults are cooking at home less frequently as they rely more on fast food, ready-made meals, and ultra-processed options. These convenience foods tend to be higher in calories, unhealthy fats, sugar, and salt, while lacking the essential nutrients found in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. This shift in eating habits has contributed to rising rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic health conditions. Additionally, research suggests that frequent consumption of restaurant and pre-packaged meals has a larger environmental footprint and is less economical over time compared to home cooking.

However, with demanding schedules, emerging adults are struggling to cook at home due to perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge, resulting in poor nutrition, financial strain, and decreased overall well-being.

Through comprehensive research, including literature reviews, case studies, and visual analyses, a far richer insight into what resonates with the needs of emerging adults is gained.

A resulting visual solution is thus enabled to directly address the two primary obstacles, perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge, by offering a practical approach to improving food literacy and home cooking habits.



Chapter 3

Design Process

Mood Board
Branding Design
Deliverables



Visual Solution

To address the primary barriers to home cooking for emerging adults, I developed a brand for a weekly meal-planning kit designed to reduce decision fatigue, simplify the cooking process, and build user confidence.

As mentioned earlier, research shows that Millennials gravitate toward brands that support their personal growth, curiosity, and social connections, while Gen Z resonate with brands that take tangible steps to address social and environmental challenges while providing products that foster joy, self-expression, and mental well-being. My vision for the brand is to create a product that resonate with both Gen Z and younger millennials—something that supports the users' personal growth and addresses social challenges, while also fostering joy, self-expression, and well-being.

The final product includes meal cards, a recipe book, labeled magnets, a shopping list, and supporting digital content (website). The kit includes 30 curated recipes—this quantity is strategically chosen to provide sufficient variety to prevent boredom while remaining small enough for users to master a core rotation, building their confidence before they explore more complex recipes. The ultimate goal is to make cooking fun and achievable, helping users take that first crucial step toward cooking regularly.

MOOD BOARD

I started by developing a brand mood board to define the visual direction. To make cooking feel less intimidating, the goal was to create an approachable, inviting, and friendly brand identity. I built three distinct mood boards to guide the brand personality, photography, and illustration style.





PHOTOGRAPHY

GENUINE / WARM
HOMEY / VIBRANT
NUTRITIOUS

ILLUSTRATION

WHIMSICAL / PLAYFUL
DOWN-TO-EARTH



BRANDING DESIGN

1. LOGO

A logo provides instant identification. It acts as a unique mark that allows customers to recognize a company, product, or service in an instant, without needing to read a word. It's a visual shortcut. The logo is the brand's visual starting point—the color palette, typography, imagery style, and overall visual language are often derived from or designed to complement the logo.

I wanted a name that captured how effortless home cooking can be. While my first idea was the Dutch word “Eetgoed” (meaning “eat good”), I realized it was too difficult for most to spell or say. The solution came from the playful phrase “easy peasy lemon squeezy,” which led me directly to the simple and memorable “Peasy.”

My initial vision for the Peasy logo was a chunkier wordmark. I began the letter from and typeface exploration in Adobe Illustrator by setting up 14 landscape format (11x17) pages. I typed the name “Peasy” and duplicate them (about 28 times on each page). I then worked my way down the font list, trying each name in a different typeface. I tried using both all capital letters and lowercase letters as well. From there, I kept narrowing down my options. I aimed to create a friendly logo that incorporates current trends in a subtle, classic way to avoid becoming dated.

peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy
peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	PEASY	<i>peasy</i>	peasy
peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	PEASY	peasy	<i>peasy</i>	peasy
peasy	peasy						
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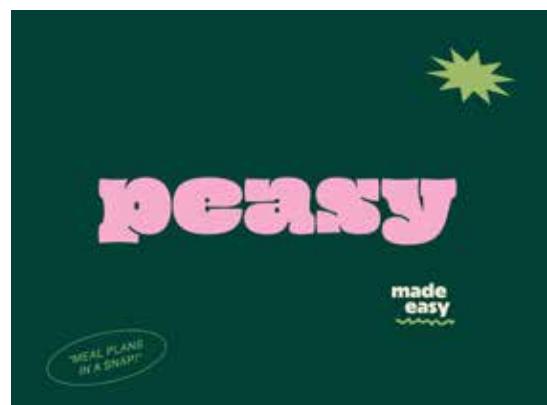
peasy	<i>peasy</i>	PEASY	peasy	PEASY	<i>PEASY</i>	PEASY	PEASY
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PEASY	peasy	peasy	peasy	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	<i>PEASY</i>
peasy	peasy	peasy	peasy	PEASY	<i>PEASY</i>	PEASY	PEASY
PEASY	peasy	peasy	peasy	PEASY	PERSY	PEASY	PEASY
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PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	<i>PEASY</i>	PEASY
PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY
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PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY	PEASY
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peasy peasy peasy **peasy** **peasy**
peasy **peasy** **peasy** peasy **peasy**

peasy

peasy



My initial typography exploration narrowed down to “Recoleta” and “Garamond Premier Pro.” I initially proceeded with “Garamond Premier Pro” for its classic sensibility. However, as the design system developed, two key issues emerged: the font looked a little too serious and conflicted with the brand personality, and specific letter combinations created awkward and trapped negative spaces.



"Recola" Typeface



"Garamond Premier Pro" Typeface



"Garamond Premier Pro" Typeface

This led to a strategic pivot to the more playful “Bagel Fat One” font, a bubbly and approachable font whose character perfectly reflects the initial vision captured in the brand mood board.

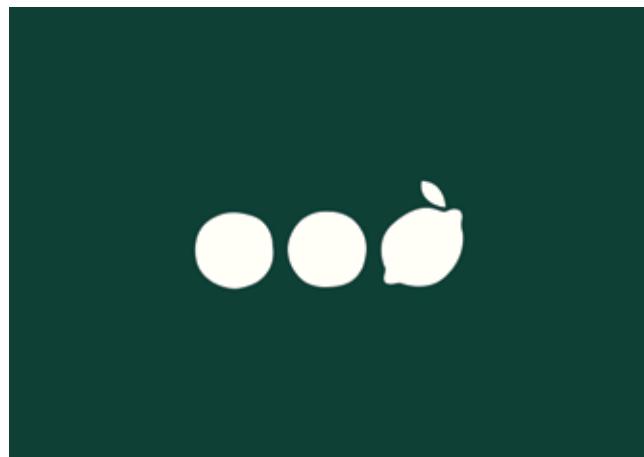
peasy.



peasy.

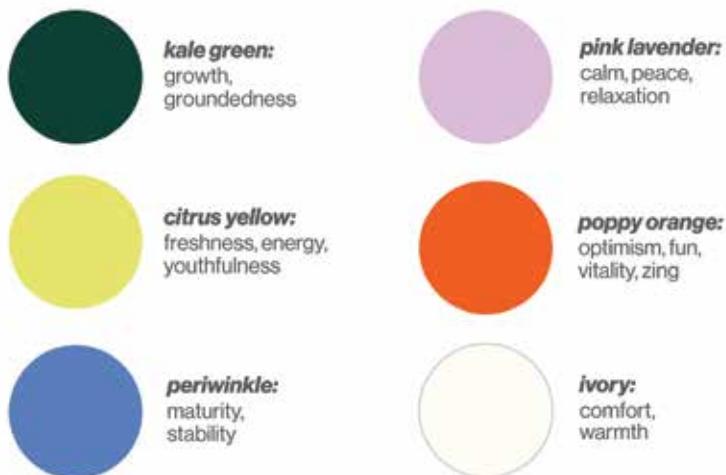
Icon Logo

I wanted to add an icon logo that can be used both with the wordmark logo and as a standalone. The icon merges the concept of ‘peas’ and ‘lemon.’ The three circular shapes represent peas in a pod, a direct visual reference to the brand name ‘PEASY.’ The inclusion of the lemon subtly evokes the common phrase “easy peasy lemon squeezy,” reinforcing the brand’s core message that home cooking can be simple and effortless.



2. COLOR PALETTE

Color plays a huge role in branding design. It sets the mood, tone, and personality of the brand. Informed by research, Gen Z are associated with vibrant and cheerful colors that symbolize their positive and optimistic perspective. When I was working on the brand colors, I wanted the palette to be colorful while also working together harmoniously at the same time. The palette balances the more neutral, versatile colors, such as Kale Green, Ivory, and Periwinkle with bright, bold accents of Poppy Orange, Pink Lavender, and Citrus Yellow. These colors will also serve a practical role in categorizing content, such as protein types in the recipe book and meal cards later on.



3. TYPOGRAPHY

Typography is a powerful branding tool that goes far beyond picking a font. It actively shapes brand perception and creates emotional connections by evoking specific feelings and associations through the character of its typefaces. Typography does not only influence how text looks, but also how it feels. Typography helps build brand recognition, enhances readability, and conveys a brand's message.

Since I wanted my brand to feel approachable and friendly, I chose sans-serif fonts for both my primary and secondary typography. According to research, Sans-Serif Fonts are seen as modern, clean, and approachable. They are often used by tech companies and startups to convey innovation and simplicity.

Bagel Fat One

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m
o p q r s t u v w x y z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Neue Haas Grotesk

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m
o p q r s t u v w x y z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m
o p q r s t u v w x y z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

The Primary font that I chose for Peasy is called “Bagel Fat One.” It is a playful and whimsical font with rounded and inflated letterforms that feel soft, bouncy, and joyful. Its personality is a blend of 1970s funk and playful modern branding. Bagel Fat One helps reframe cooking as a fun, enjoyable, and stress-free activity.

Peasy’s secondary font is called “Neue Haas Grotesk.” It offers the timeless, neutral appeal of

Helvetica but with some refined details (slightly looser spacing and more graceful curves). Its characters retain more of the organic “human” touch, resulting in a slightly warmer personality with great legibility, and it is neutral without being too generic. Because of the font’s clarity, it works wonderfully for the recipe book where information needs to be clear, organized, and reliable.

The third typography choice was added later when I needed to bridge the gap between my photography, layout design, and illustration. My photography is structured and styled, and the layout is clean and simple, but the illustrations lean more whimsical. My handwriting ties them all together, making the brand feel more personal, less serious, and more cohesive overall.

YAY!

YOUR GUIDE TO
"HOME COOKING MADE EASY"
WITH PEASY

(GOOD) FOOD IS
VERY OFTEN,
EVEN MOST OFTEN,
SIMPLE FOOD.

PESTO PASTA
WITH SALMON

PAGE 31



4. PHOTOGRAPHY

I believe photography is one of the most powerful tools for defining a brand's aesthetic.

A consistent and intentional images builds identity, evokes emotion, and creates deeper connections by telling a story. Research indicates that Gen Z and Millennials are drawn to brands that reflect authenticity. For Peasy, this

translates to a style that is genuine, warm, and bright, using natural light and shadow to create depth and visual interest. The photos will be narrative-driven, showcasing plated dishes alongside their ingredients or capturing the candid process of cooking. My photographic approach is deeply influenced by the early days of Kinfolk Magazine.



5. ILLUSTRATION

In branding, illustration can help create a unique visual identity, simplify complex ideas, establish mood, and add personality. To help cooking feel less serious and more approachable, I found whimsical, playful, and textured styles of illustration more engaging than perfectly structured or geometric ones. I decided that having spot illustrations throughout the Peasy Recipe Book will help add visual interest and set a fun and whimsy mood for the brand overall.



DELIVERABLES

The deliverables include:

- Meal “Planning” Cards
- Recipe Book
- Shopping List
- Magnets (labeled each day of the week)

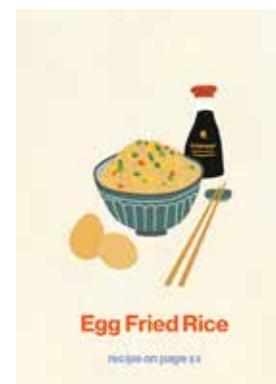
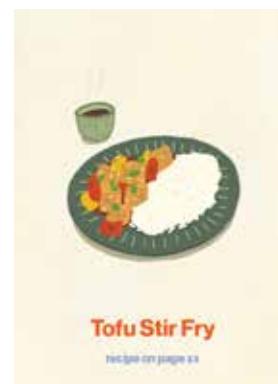
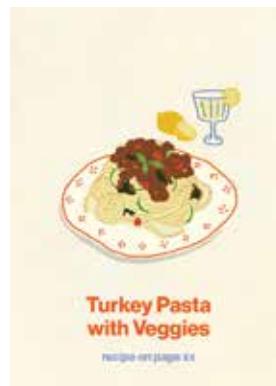
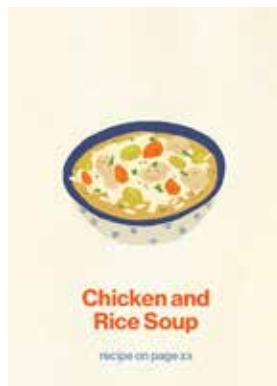
My academic foundation is in studio art, which I expanded by taking a few graphic design electives out of interest during my undergraduate studies. Years after graduating, I took on a full-time role as a graphic designer and visual artist for a Christian nonprofit, where I further developed my skills through hands-on experience in both design and illustration. While my graphic design skills have been mainly self-taught during my time there, I am still not proficient with the tools and shortcuts of the design programs. When conducting my research, I knew that for the visual solution to solve my problem effectively, the deliverables would need to lean more heavily on graphic design. Although this medium is outside of my comfort zone, I was determined to tackle this meaningful work on a topic I am passionate about.

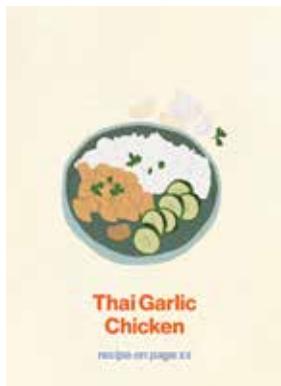
1. MEAL “PLANNING” CARDS

A core feature of Peasy is the meal card deck, which saves users from decision fatigue by letting them randomly draw a weekly menu. My original vision was for a set of 30 whimsically illustrated cards that users could pin to their fridge with the provided magnets to organize their weekly meals.

However, having completed 20 out of 30 cards, I noticed that I struggled to maintain consistent

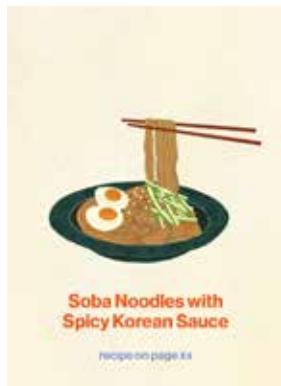
illustration quality. The style, while intended to be whimsical, leaned too serious and failed to align with the brand's aesthetic established in the mood board, largely because I was relying on photos of real dishes for references. This created a visual disconnect between the cards and the accompanying recipe book.





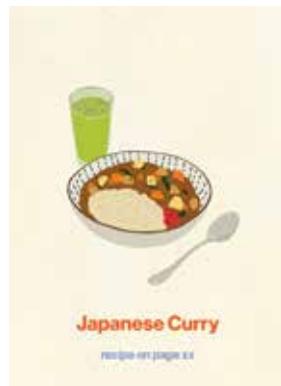
**Thai Garlic
Chicken**

recipe on page 11



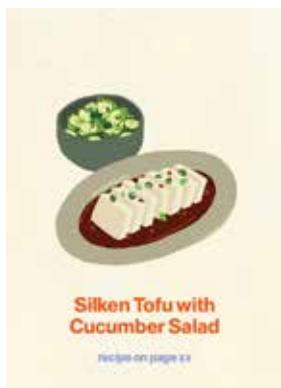
**Soba Noodles with
Spicy Korean Sauce**

recipe on page 11



Japanese Curry

recipe on page 11



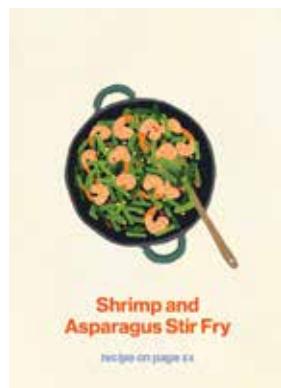
**Silken Tofu with
Cucumber Salad**

recipe on page 11



**Arugula Mandarin
Salad with Tempeh**

recipe on page 11



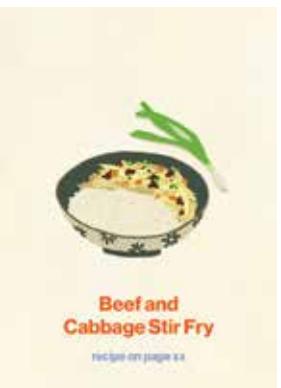
**Shrimp and
Asparagus Stir Fry**

recipe on page 11



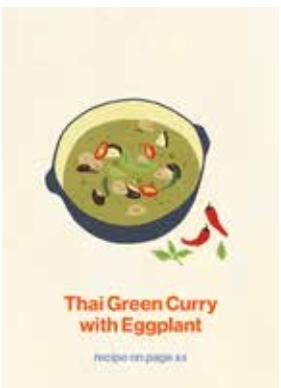
Naan Pizza

recipe on page 11



**Beef and
Cabbage Stir Fry**

recipe on page 11



**Thai Green Curry
with Eggplant**

recipe on page 11

I met with my thesis chair to get some feedback on my progress, and she recommended further exploration of the illustration style and the card composition. Despite several weeks of experimentation, the illustrations did not seem to be working.

After a review with my thesis committee, my chair suggested I pivot to my strength: photography. This was the most difficult part of the entire process because it meant scrapping

20 out of 30 finished cards. The pivot was very discouraging at the time, but it was crucial for creating a cohesive and authentic brand experience.

To ensure visual consistency with the recipe book, the new card design incorporates photography, illustrated borders, and a color-coding system using the brand colors. The typography strategically combines the primary font with my handwriting to tie all the elements together.



2. RECIPE BOOK

My vision is to create a recipe book that feels like a cooking companion. In addition to providing step-by-step cooking instructions, I want to include kitchen essentials, how-to guides, pantry staples, and cooking tips. To enhance the experience, the book will feature inviting photography, whimsical spot illustrations, fun facts, and encouraging quotes throughout.

I started by creating a list of recipes that my husband and I have developed and incorporated into our weekly meal rotations. I organized and finalized the list and selected 2 to 3 recipes each week to cook and photograph over a span of 3 to 4 months. Some of the recipes needed to be tested multiple times to ensure the best results.



CURATED RECIPE LIST

The cucumber tomato salad
Omelett?
Densford salad (arugula, apple cider vinegar, oranges, goat cheese, walnut, red onion, tomatoes)
Cabbage soup?
Waffles
Air-fry tempeh
Air-fryer baked potatoes

ALPHABETICAL ORDER

1. Arugula mandarin salad with tempeh [PICTURE](#)
2. Beef and cabbage stir-fry
3. Burgers with kale chips
4. Chicken and rice soup
5. Chicken fajitas
6. Deconstructed shepherd's pie (*recipe this week*)
7. Egg fried rice
8. Egg salad sandwich
9. [Fridge-foraged-Pasta](#) [PICTURE](#) (*written recipe done*)
10. [Hummus-tempeh-wrap](#) [PICTURE](#) (*written recipe done*)
11. Japanese curry (*written recipe done*)
12. Mediterranean bowl (rotisserie chicken)
13. [Naan-pizza](#) [PICTURE](#) (*written recipe done*)
14. One pot chicken and rice skillet
15. Pesto naan pizza (with chicken)
16. Pesto pasta with broccoli and salmon. [PICTURE?](#)
17. Roasted root veggies with fried egg (sweet potatoes, onion, zucchini, broc.) [PICTURE](#)
18. Salmon with roasted veggies
19. Shrimp and asparagus stir-fry (*recipe this week*)
20. Shrimp tacos with mango salsa
21. [Soba-noodles-with-gochejang-sauce](#) [PICTURE](#) (*written recipe done*)
22. Silken tofu with cucumber salad
23. Spicy sesame soba salad
24. Thai green curry with eggplant
25. [Thai-garlic-chicken](#) [PICTURE](#) (*written recipe done*)
26. Thai Grilled Chicken Salad (Rotisserie chicken). [PICTURE](#)
27. [Tofu-stir-fry](#) [PICTURE](#)
28. Tuna bowl (gochujang sauce)
29. Turkey Chili
30. Turkey pasta with veggies [PICTURE](#)
31. Veggie omelette with toast (spinach, mushrooms, onions, tomatoes?)



The photography part was the most enjoyable for me because prop styling and photography are my strongest skills. However, the biggest challenge was the weather, as it was a very rainy summer. Each week, I had to plan my cooking

days around the weather, trying to choose the sunniest days for my shoots. On some days, I had to rush through the cooking process to capture the perfect lighting for my photography.



My initial concept was to create an A5-size recipe book, as I had envisioned a “booklet” in a kit format. But I soon found the format was too restrictive—it compressed the text and didn’t do justice to the photography.



Tofu Stir-fry with Bell Peppers

FRESH INGREDIENTS	SAUCES / CONDIMENTS
Firm or extra firm tofu (1 pack)	Better Than Bouillon chicken broth (1 tsp)
Bell peppers (x2)	Fermented soybean (1 tsp)
Garlic (3 bulbs)	Soy sauce (1 tsp)
Fresh ginger (2 inches)	Fish sauce (few drops)
Green onions (2 stalks)	

PANTRY

- Rice
- Cooking oil
- Corn starch (1/4 tsp)



COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

- Cut chicken into bite size pieces. Dice the eggplant.
- Skim the top coconut milk fat and coconut milk (about 200 ml total) and green curry paste into a wok (or pot) on medium heat. Gently stir constantly until the fat separates.
- Add chicken and egg plant to the wok or pot and stir until chicken is cooked. Add the rest of the coconut milk and red chili peppers (optional). Add fish sauce and sugar. Mix well.
- Once the eggplant is tender, add basil and gently stir until wilted. Serve with rice.

FUN FACT: Bell peppers contain more Vitamin C than oranges!

Beef and Cabbage Stir Fry

FRESH INGREDIENTS	SPICES/SEASONINGS
Pre-cooked beef strips (150g)	Tofu (1/2 lb)
White cabbage (1/2 head)	Black pepper (1/2 tsp)
Red bell pepper (1/2)	Garlic powder (1/2 tsp)
Onion (1)	Curry powder (1/2 tsp)

PANTRY

- Oil (1/4 cup)
- Water (1/4 cup)
- Worcestershire sauce (1/2 tsp)

SAUCES/CONDIMENTS

- Soy sauce (1/2 cup)
- White vinegar (1/4 cup)

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Heat oil in a large wok or pan over medium heat. Add the beef strips and cook until browned. Remove from the wok.
- Heat the wok again and add the onion, bell pepper, and cabbage. Cook until the vegetables are soft.
- Return the beef to the wok. Add the soy sauce, white vinegar, and Worcestershire sauce. Cook until the flavors are well combined.
- Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Shrimp Tacos

FRESH INGREDIENTS	SPICES/SEASONINGS
Raw shrimp (medium size)	Taco seasoning (1/2 tsp)
Tomato (1)	Black pepper (1/2 tsp)
Cilantro (1/2 cup)	Garlic powder (1/2 tsp)
Lime (1)	Ground cumin (1/2 tsp)
Chopped cilantro (1/2 cup)	Chili powder (1/2 tsp)
Chopped onions (1/2 cup)	Salt (1/2 tsp)

SAUCES/CONDIMENTS

- Mayonnaise (1/2 cup)
- Hot sauce (1/2 cup)

PANTRY

- Oil (1/4 cup)
- Water (1/4 cup)

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Boil shrimp until done (about 3 minutes).
- In a small bowl, mix together mayonnaise, hot sauce, and taco seasoning.
- In a separate bowl, mix together ground cumin, chili powder, black pepper, garlic powder, and salt.
- Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the shrimp to the skillet. When the shrimp are pink, remove them from the heat and set aside.
- Shred the lime and chop the cilantro and onions.
- Warm tortillas in a dry skillet over medium heat.
- Fill tortillas with shrimp, lime juice, cilantro, onions, and mayonnaise mixture.
- Top with additional cilantro and lime juice if desired.

Burgers and Kale Chips

FRESH INGREDIENTS	SPICES/SEASONINGS
Whole wheat hamburger buns (4)	Taco seasoning (1/2 tsp)
Ground beef (1 lb)	Black pepper (1/2 tsp)
Kale (1 bunch)	Garlic powder (1/2 tsp)
Onions (1)	Ground cumin (1/2 tsp)
Tomatoes (1)	Chili powder (1/2 tsp)

PANTRY

- Oil (1/4 cup)
- Water (1/4 cup)

SAUCES/CONDIMENTS

- Mayonnaise (1/2 cup)
- Hot sauce (1/2 cup)

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat oven to 400°F.
- Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Wash kale and remove stems. Tear leaves into bite-sized pieces.
- Place kale on the prepared baking sheet and drizzle with oil. Season with salt and pepper.
- Roast kale in the oven for 10-15 minutes, until crispy.
- While kale is roasting, cook ground beef in a large skillet over medium heat until browned.
- Season ground beef with taco seasoning, black pepper, garlic powder, and cumin.
- Shape ground beef into four patties.
- Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the buns and toast them on both sides.
- Assemble burgers by placing a patty in each bun, adding toppings like lettuce, cheese, and tomatoes.
- Top with mayonnaise and hot sauce if desired.

This led to a key step in evolving the design into a more spacious 8x10 format.

This shift also inspired a complete redesign of the layout. Instead of simply arranging the recipes in alphabetical order, I organized the book into sections and color-coded them according to the different protein options. This change set the direction in the redesigning of the meal cards as well. Additionally, I revamped the layout of each cooking instruction page to provide more breathing space and improve overall user experience.

Knowing that I would be incorporating spot illustrations throughout the cookbook, I wanted

to find a way to connect these whimsical illustrations with more structured and styled photography, as well as a clean and simple layout. While researching other cookbooks for inspiration, I came across “Cake” by Maira Kalman. In her book, she uses her own handwriting for each recipe title, which adds warmth and a personal touch. This inspired me to do the same for my recipe titles in the Peasy Recipe Book. I decided to include my own handwriting as the official third typography for the brand.





THAI GARLIC CHICKEN

fresh ingredients
Garlic (3 small heads)
Chicken breast (2 lbs)
Cucumber (1)
Rice (4 cups)

seasonings
Ground pepper (1/8 tsp)
Unsalted butter (1/2 cup)

condiments
Peanut sauce (1/2 tsp)
Lily sauce (1/2 tsp)

pantry
Avocado oil (1/2 cup)
Jasmine rice (2 cups dry)
Sesame oil (2 oz)
Sugar (1/4 tsp)

serves: 6 | time: 20 min

- Mince garlic and char it. Add oil and stems.
- Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces. Marinate chicken in a mixture of soy sauce, fish sauce, sugar, unsalted butter, garlic, stems and prep.
- Heat orange juice, stock, peanut sauce and oil over medium-high heat. Add chicken, cooking on each side for about 2 minutes until browned. Continue to cook stirring occasionally until chicken is cooked through—about 10 min more.
- Serve with rice and sliced cucumbers. Garnish with cilantro.

Note: For a smoky taste, basting with a bone-in chicken, cook 8 sheets of chopped garlic in the flavor, stirring constantly and golden brown.

FUN FACT

Garlic chicken is a popular and easy Thai dish, enjoyed as both a weekend meal and a common street food. It's usually topped with another raw (steamed) garlic, a classic garnish that adds a bit more burst of texture and flavor. This versatile topping is also used in numerous other Thai dishes, from noodles and soups to stir-fries.

healthy SP



SHRIMP TACOS

fresh ingredients
Garlic (3 small heads)
Limes (3)
Oriental chili powder (1/2 cup)
Shrimp (1 lb), peeled and deveined
Sesame oil (1/2 cup or pack)
Sesame seeds
Optional: jalapeño (1)
Optional: mushrooms (1)

seasonings
Chili powder (1/2 tsp)
Cumin (1/4 tsp)
Garlic powder (1/2 tsp)
Oriental powder (1/2 tsp)
Smoked paprika (1/4 tsp)
Sweet & spicy do (1/2)

condiments
Sweet salsa (topping)
Optional: hot sauce

pantry
Avocado oil (1/2 cup)
Flour tortillas (4-6)

serves: 4 | time: 35 min

- Discard stems, chop cilantro, wedge limes, and thinly slice jalapeños and radishes (if using).
- In a small bowl, combine chili powder, garlic powder, cumin powder, cayenne, smoked paprika and half Avocado oil. Then toss shrimp in seasoning mixture.
- Heat oil in medium-sized skillet and add over medium heat. Add shrimp and cook for 2–4 minutes each side, or until completely fully cooked.
- To serve, fill tortillas with shrimp, toppings, and a squeeze of lime.

healthy SP

The original plan for the “Pantry Staples” section involved illustrating each ingredient individually—a process I found to be quite time-intensive. Following my thesis chair’s advice to lean into my strengths, I switched to using photography, which allowed me to capitalize on my strengths and execute the section with greater efficiency and impact.

Staple Items

*All the sauces, condiments, and seasonings you’ll need
(and will actually use on repeat).*



Soy sauce
(or liquid aminico for
gluten sensitivity)



Fish Sauce
(I recommend
MegaChef)



Better Than Bouillon
(Roasted Chicken Base
or Seasoned Veg Base)



Gochujang
(spicy fermented
Korean chili paste)





In response to a new photography-focused direction, I decided to incorporate more lifestyle photography alongside my food photography. I asked my friends to host a small dinner gathering where they could prepare one of my recipes

and I could photograph the experience. The resulting candid photos of the cooking process and dinner gathering were so successful that they became the unifying visual narrative for the entire recipe book and the meal cards.





After organizing the entire recipe book and incorporating the revised cooking instructions, I reviewed the pages to identify where spot illustrations could enhance visual interest. I then created the illustrations and determined the best placement for them throughout the book.

MEDITERRANEAN BOWL WITH ROTISSERIE CHICKEN

Food ingredients
Ground turkey (1 lb)
Lemon (1)
Olive oil (1/4 cup)
Rotisserie chicken (1 lb)
Tomatoes, canned (15 oz)
Ginger, dried (1/2 tsp)
Garlic, peeled/garlic
Oil (olive oil)

spices/seasonings
Baker's seasoning (1/4 tsp)
Italian seasoning (1/4 tsp)
Lavender (1/2 tsp)

condiments
Dijon mustard (1/2 tsp)

beverages
Citra-flavored oil (1/2 cup)
Ginger (1/2 cup)

extra
Extra-flavored oil (1/2 cup)



ONE POT CHICKEN PILAF

Food ingredients
Ground chicken (1 lb)
Chicken breast (1 lb)
Onion, medium (1/2 lb)
Zucchini (1)
Spinach (fresh) (1 pound)
Ginger (dried) (1/2 tsp)

spices/seasonings
Garlic powder (1/2 tsp)
Italian seasoning (1/2 tsp)
Cumin (dried) (1/2 tsp)
Salt (sea salt) (1/2 tsp)

condiments
Dijon mustard (1/2 tsp)
Rouxine (1/2 tsp)
Flax-milled oil (1/2 cup)

pantry
Extra virgin olive oil (1/2 cup)

Serves: 2 | Time: 30 min

- Stir rotisserie chicken in half slices and tomatoes, and combine in a bowl with 1/4 cup Italian seasoning and Baker's seasoning. Set aside.
- Steam chicken until tender.
- To serve, top with shredded (preferably steamed) chicken and vegetables.

Serves: 4 | Time: 45 min

- Dice onion into small cubes and keep aside.
- Cut chicken breasts, then add a dash of oil (1/2 tbsp) and season with Dijon mustard, and salt & pepper.
- Heat a large pot and heat oil over medium heat. Add 1 bag of rice. Cook (stir) for 3-4 minutes or until browned. Then remove and set aside.
- Add onions to pot and cook for 2-3 min, or until softened. Then add 1/2 cup Italian seasoning, cumin powder, garlic powder, and 1/2 tsp pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally for 3-4 minutes.
- Add dry quinoa (quinoa flakes), 4 lbs chicken breast with 1/2 tsp Baker's seasoning, 1/2 cup water, and 1/2 cup oil (1/2 cup olive oil). You may need to add more water if quinoa is dry (1/2 cup more). Stir until all the ingredients are well mixed.
- Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and cover. Let cook for 20-25 min – until all the liquid is absorbed and rice is tender.
- Serve hot, optionally garnished with fresh chopped herbs (like basil), and a splash of extra virgin olive oil.

Photo:  38



DECONSTRUCTED SHEPHERD'S PIE

Food ingredients
Ground lamb (1 lb) (or ground beef)
Mashed potato, frozen (1 cup)
Potato, russet (1 lb)
Yellow onion (1)

spices/seasonings
Dijon mustard (1/2 tsp)
Thyme (dried) (1/2 tsp)
White pepper (1/2 tsp)

condiments
Dijon mustard (1/2 tsp)
Rouxine (1/2 tsp)
Salt (sea salt) (1/2 tsp)
Tomato sauce (1/2 cup)

pantry
Avocado oil (1/2 cup)
Mayo (dairy-free) (1/2 cup)

Serves: 4 | Time: 45 min

- Fry lamb in a large skillet until brown. Add onion, thyme, pepper, and white pepper, and allow lamb to cook for 10 min. If the lamb is not browned yet, increase the heat to 10 min – until fully cooked and evenly browned/brown.
- Mash potato, then combine lamb and potato. Combine with mayo, oil, avocado oil, and tomato sauce in 1/2 cup of melted Rouxine. Mix well and cover (medium heat). Add ground lamb (lamb cooking for 10 min) and thyme. Add tomato sauce – another 5 min. Add thyme, pepper, and salt for flavor, then stir again quickly, covering and serving for 10 min.
- Add Rouxine, mayo, and potato and combine gently. Use Rouxine to bind the meat and potatoes together for added flavor and texture.
- Serve and enjoy!

TIP
Wrapping lamb in a damp paper towel before microwaving creates a barrier around meat that cooks more evenly, protecting it from being thoroughly dried out.

Photo:  38

3. SHOPPING LIST

The Peasy Shopping List is designed to help users organize their weekly grocery trips. The Shopping List is structured similarly to the ingredients list in the recipe book, categorizing

items into four sections: Fresh Ingredients, Seasonings, Condiments, and Pantry.

In the initial designs of the shopping list, I divided each section equally. However, my husband suggested that the fresh ingredients section should be larger. As a result, I adjusted the sizes of each section to better reflect the actual user experience based on the recipes.

peasy.

SHOPPING LIST!

fresh ingredients

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

seasonings

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

condiments

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

pantry

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

peasy.

SHOPPING LIST!

fresh ingredients

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

seasonings

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

condiments

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

pantry

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Initially, the word “Peasy” was more prominently displayed at the top. To improve clarity and informational hierarchy, I made the phrase “shopping list” larger, reduced the size of the Peasy logo, and moved it to the bottom of the design.



4. LABELED MAGNETS

During the development of Peasy, I did not think about providing any way for users to display their Meal Cards after the cards had been picked. However, my thesis chair pointed out that this would be crucial for organizing weekly meals for users. While brainstorming solutions, the idea for the labeled magnets came to me quickly, as I recalled that my husband and I had recently

purchased a magnet-making kit for our home. I was thrilled about this simple yet effective idea for effortlessly organizing a weekly meal plan.

Each magnet is labeled with a day of the week, allowing users to attach Meal Cards to the specific days based on their schedules and cravings.



Chapter 4

Visual Solution

**Peasy Meal Cards
Labeled Magnets
Shopping List
Peasy Recipe Book**





FINAL DELIVERABLES

Research shows that emerging adults face two main obstacles to cooking: perceived time constraints and limited culinary knowledge.

- **Time Barrier:** Meal planning is often seen as an overwhelming task, leading to decision fatigue, while healthy cooking is perceived as overly time-consuming and complicated.
- **Knowledge Barrier:** A lack of cooking confidence and recipe ideas leads to “food boredom” and kitchen avoidance.

The different components of the Peasy Meal Planning Kit are designed to directly address these barriers.

Component	How It Solves Time Barriers	How It Builds Culinary Knowledge
Meal Planning Cards	Eliminates hours of meal planning; reduces decision fatigue.	Provides curated recipe ideas; eliminates “I don’t know what to cook.”
Labeled Magnets	Enables instant, visual weekly scheduling.	Helps build familiarity with the weekly dishes through exposure.
Shopping List	Saves time with an organized, efficient list for one-trip shopping.	Teaches ingredient organization and prep.
Recipe Book	Features time-saving recipes and shortcuts.	Builds confidence with the step-by-step instructions and a core set of easy-to-master meals.



Informed by research, the kit encourages a practical approach that moves away from the pressure of cooking from scratch. Incorporating healthy convenience items such as frozen vegetables and pre-made sauces helps users create meals that are less daunting and more manageable.

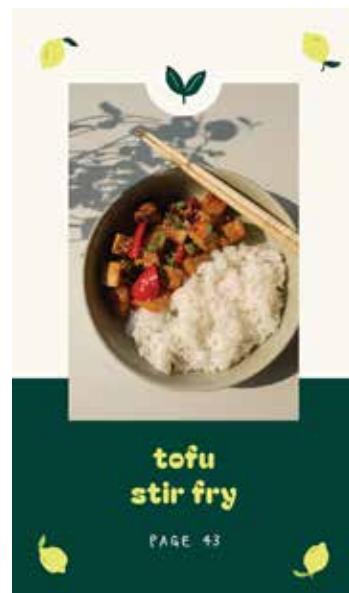
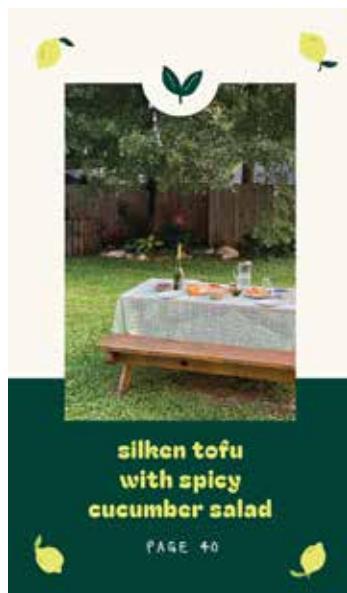
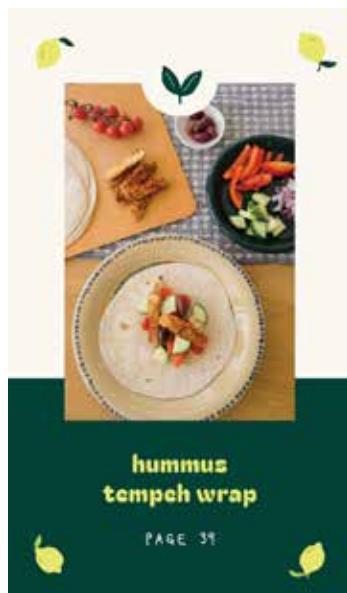
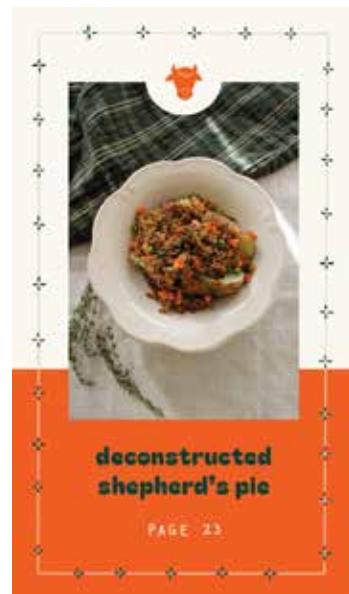
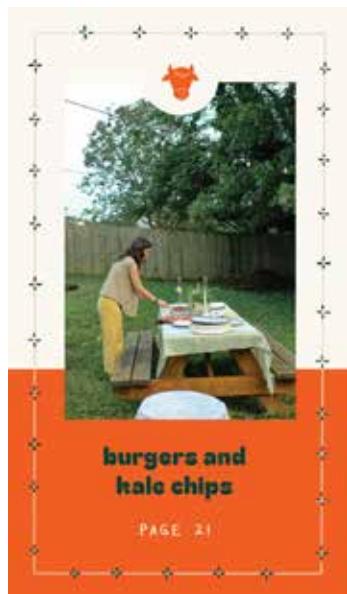
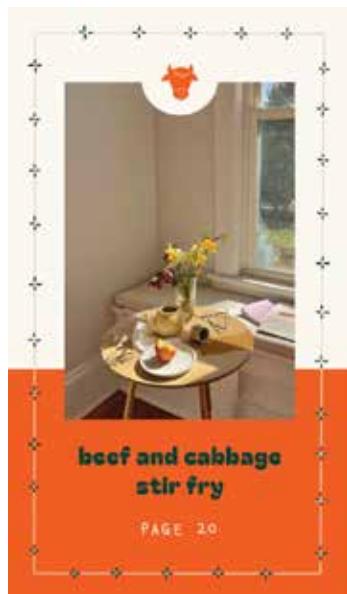
The development of Peasy's recipes combined in-depth research with one-on-one training from a professional nutrition consultant. The result is a collection of easy, healthy recipes where each one is a complete meal. Every dish

is nutritionally balanced with protein, carbohydrates, vegetables, and healthy fats, providing all the essential macronutrients in one place, eliminating the need to juggle multiple recipes for mains and sides.

With pre-balanced meals, the guesswork is eliminated. Users don't have to plan what to eat or worry about nutritional balance. This exposure to well-proportioned meals serves as a practical tool for improving food literacy over time.

1. PEASY MEAL CARDS

The Meal Cards eliminate the need to plan meals from scratch. Users simply draw cards at random from the deck to automatically determine their weekly menu, saving significant time and reducing decision fatigue.





**arugula mandarin
salad with
boiled eggs**

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egg fried rice

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**egg salad
sandwiches**

PAGE 30



**veggie
omelette**

PAGE 31



**soba noodles
with spicy
korean sauce**

PAGE 33



**chicken and
rice soup**

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**chicken
fajitas**

PAGE 50



**japanese
curry**

PAGE 51



**naan
pizza**

PAGE 53



**mediterranean
bowl with
rotisserie chicken**

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**one pot
chicken pilaf**

PAGE 55



**thai garlic
chicken**

PAGE 57



**thai green curry
with eggplant**

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**thai grilled
chicken salad**

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**turkey
chili**

PAGE 60



**turkey pasta
with zucchini**

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**fridge-foraged
pasta**

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**one pan salmon
and veggies**

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**pesto pasta
with salmon**

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**shrimp
tacos**

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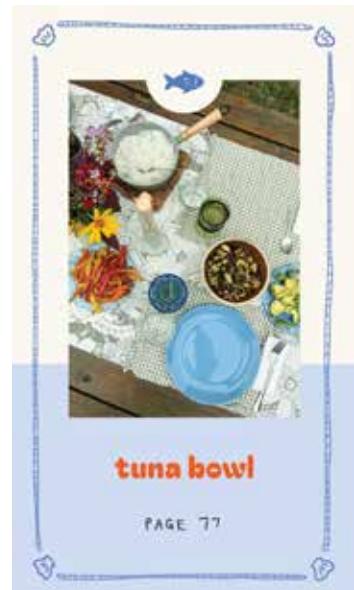
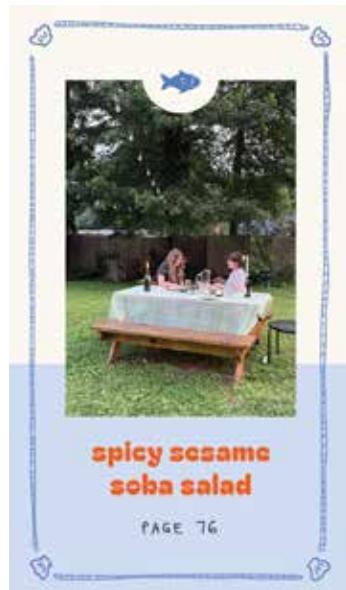
**shrimp and
asparagus
stir fry**

PAGE 74



**smoked salmon
bagel with
side salad**

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2. LABELED MAGNETS

Each magnet is labeled each day of the week. After the cards have been picked, users can pin the Meal Cards to their fridge with the magnets. This helps with quick organization to assign meals to the desired days of the week without the need to write anything down. Having a visual display of the week's meals reduces the burden of remembering what to cook each day and keeps everyone in the household informed. For added convenience, an extra magnet is included to hold the Shopping List for the week's grocery run.



3. SHOPPING LIST

After selecting their Meal Cards for the week, users will use the page numbers on the cards to find the corresponding recipes in the Peasy Recipe Book. They can check what ingredients they already have at home and then complete the Peasy Shopping List with only the items needed for that week's grocery shopping. This saves time by consolidating the week's grocery needs into a single, efficient trip.





4. RECIPE BOOK

On cooking day, users simply open the recipe book to the correct page and cook away!

The Peasy Recipe Book serves as a cooking companion in the kitchen. It features easy-to-follow, step-by-step cooking instructions, along with various sections designed to enhance the cooking experience, including Kitchen Essentials, How-To Guides, and Pantry Staples.

The book is organized by protein types and is color-coded to correspond with the Peasy Meal Cards for ease of use.

The Kitchen Essentials section lists the necessary tools for the recipes, such as cutting boards, pots, pans, and cooking utensils.



The Pantry Staples section is divided into three categories: Spices, Eastern Staples, and Western Staples. The recipes are thoughtfully curated to utilize these basic spices, seasonings, and condiments. This approach enables users to

stock their pantry efficiently, ensuring they have a core selection of ingredients for every recipe in the Peasy Recipe Book, eliminating the need to purchase new seasonings for each new dish.



The How-To section includes fundamental cooking techniques that users can refer to at any time, such as boiling an egg, cooking rice and

quinoa on the stovetop, handling leftovers and storage, preparing meat and vegetables, and heating a pan.



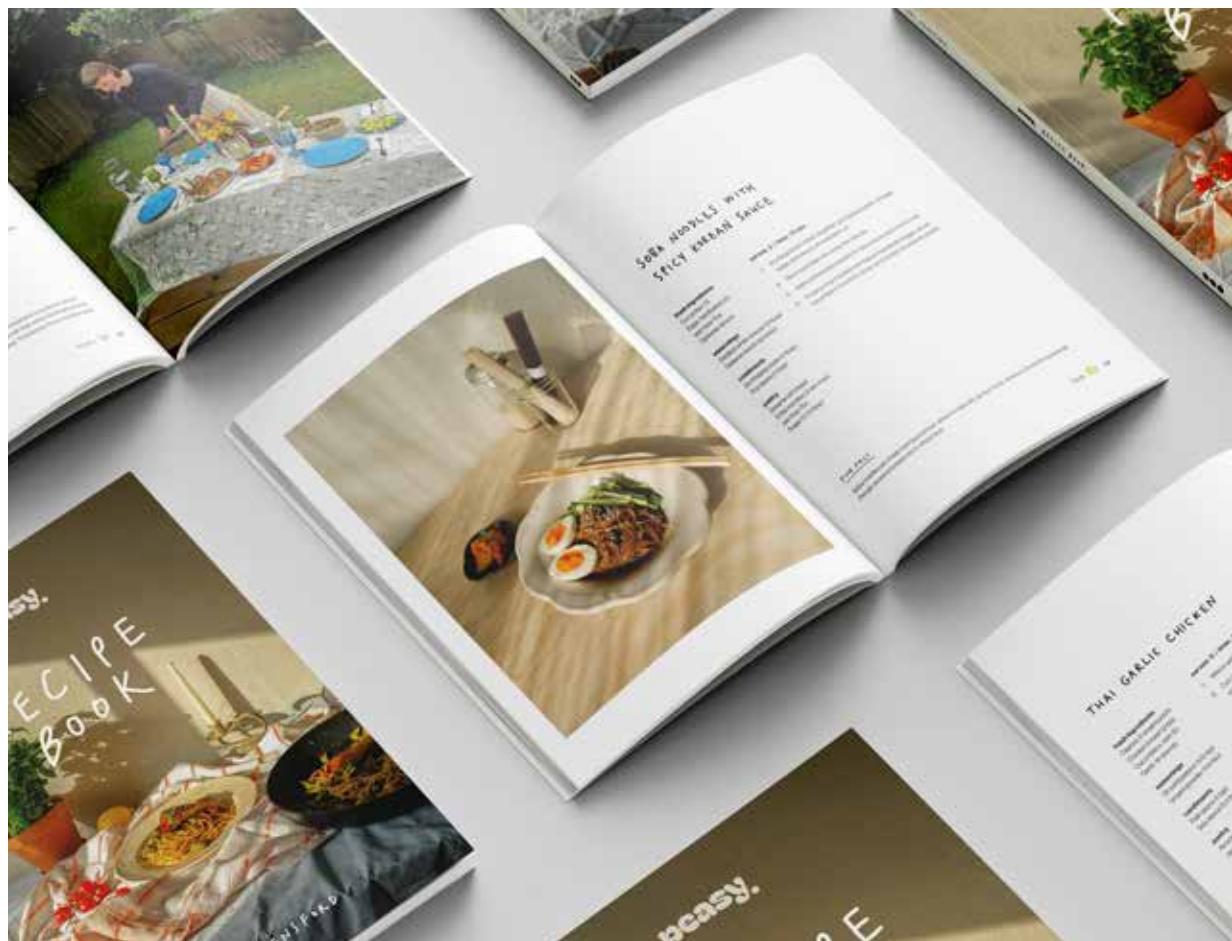
Most recipes in the Peasy Recipe Book can be made in 30 minutes or less, with only a few dishes requiring 45 to 60 minutes, none of which necessitate long, active cooking times.

Moreover, Peasy recipes cost between \$1 and \$5 per serving, allowing users to save a significant amount of money compared to eating out or ordering food delivery.

Home cooking also helps reduce the unnecessary packaging that comes with frozen meals or pre-packaged food. To promote environmental

awareness, the cooking methods in the Peasy Recipe Book focus on stovetop recipes and reheating refrigerated leftovers in the microwave. These methods are supported by research as the best options for minimizing environmental impact and carbon footprint.

Additionally, the Peasy Recipe Book features beautiful photography, inspiring quotes, fun facts, and whimsical illustrations to make the cooking process more enjoyable and inviting.













Chapter 5

Conclusion



Conclusion

The convenience of modern food culture—from ready-made meals to on-demand delivery—is creating a hidden crisis for emerging adults. Faced with limited time and cooking knowledge, this generation is experiencing a decline in physical health, an increase in financial pressure, and a lower overall quality of life, all directly linked to their dietary habits.

One of the biggest barriers is the exhausting mental work of deciding what to cook. Many existing tools still overlook this core problem of decision fatigue. My research confirms that emerging adults want to eat healthily but are hindered by decision fatigue, perceived time constraints, and a lack of cooking skills.

My solution directly addresses this challenge for people who value health but struggle to cook despite their desire to. The resulting product lifts the mental load of meal planning, helping them organize their time and build confidence in the kitchen.

By mastering a core rotation of 30 balanced recipes, users systematically build cooking knowledge and food literacy—the key to lasting dietary change. My hope is that Peasy will serve as a catalyst, demonstrating that healthy cooking can be possible even in a fast-paced world.

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Appendix

Figure 1.1 An Image of An Urban Poster Mock-up With Two Hands Holding Tomatoes. <https://www.garnishstudios.com/project/misfitsmarket>

Figure 1.2 Photograph of Misfits Market Delivery Box. <https://technical.ly/startups/startup-misfits-market-hiring-100-people-food-delivery-demand-coronavirus-covid19/>

Figure 1.3 Photograph of Two *Odds & Ends*' Olive Oil Containers (Misfits Market's Food-Upcycle Brand). <https://blog.misfitsmarket.com/misfits-market-brand-odds-and-ends/>

Figure 2.1 A Picture of “Something Nutritious” Website, About Page. <https://somethingnutritiousblog.com/about/>

Figure 2.2 An Image of the Recipe Index. <https://somethingnutritiousblog.com/recipe-index/>

Figure 3.1 A Picture of BAGGU’s Ad for Green Crescent Bag

Figure 3.2 A Picture of BAGGU’s Go Pouch Set. www.baggu.com/collections/pouches-and-cases

Figure 3.3 A Picture of BAGGU Crew Socks. www.baggu.com/collections/socks-and-slippers

Figure 3.4 A Picture of BAGGU Cloud Bag in French Blue. www.pinterest.com/pin/213146994859828394/

Figure 3.5 A Picture of Standard Baggu in “Yubari” Pattern. www.baggu.com/collections/reusable-bags

Figure 3.6 A Picture of BAGGU’s Crescent Bag in French Blue. https://www.instagram.com/p/DGJOpZZyxLJ/?img_index=1