

Jessica Dang: Hi, there. You're listening to Episode Number 11 of the Cook Smarts podcast. I'm Jess Dang, the founder of Cook Smarts, and I'm here to help you become a more confident and organized cook in the kitchen. So have you all missed me? Because I have missed you. It's been a couple of months since we released our first 10 podcast episodes for Season One. And as some of you know, I had a baby girl named Charlie right around the release of the first episode in late April. And our family of five is just doing great. Charlie is now already four months old. She's smiling, cooing, and just the sweetest, chilliest third child anyone could ever wish for.

Jessica Dang: But we've definitely had some challenges with the older two. So Neko just turned four a few weeks ago, and Bowie turned two three months ago. And they are just like two peas in a pod. Not only do they share a room, but they also share a bed. They have a bunk bed, but neither kid wants the top bunk. So they share the bottom full size mattress, and they never ever want to go to sleep. And they gang up against me and my husband during bedtime. And yeah, it is just fun to be taken down by two little human beings, who don't even reach your hip, every single night. It is a humbling experience, part of parenthood, I guess.

Jessica Dang: But mostly, these two have just embraced their little sister, and we've had such a great summer adjusting to our new normal. I, of course, took a little bit of time off. But if you know me, you know that I love my job and Cook Smarts. And I was just super excited to get back to work and brainstorming what we were going to bring you in Season Two. Of course there is still tons to cover, and we've got another 10 episodes filled with tips and tricks to help you live happier, simpler, and smarter in the kitchen.

Jessica Dang: Now, if you haven't listened to our first 10 episodes, scroll through our podcast feed on your podcast player because I know there is something for you in there. Maybe you need some advice on future pots and pan purchase, or how to meal plan better. Or perhaps you just found out you're expecting, congrats by the way, and need to get a process in place for how to feed yourself while you're sleep-deprived and caring for a newborn. We've got episodes that address all those questions. So check out one of our previous episodes because we've put together lots of great practical and usable tips for you.

Jessica Dang: And speaking of practical and useful tips, today's episode is full of them. For this kick off to Season Two and back to school season, I've invited one of my entrepreneurial heroes Laura Fuentes to give us advice on planning for and packing school lunches, because I know millions of us are about to face that daily task. And Laura is an official lunch expert. Her company Momable started out as a lunch meal planning company but has grown also to offer dinner meal plans and three transformative health programs. One of them focuses on helping families eat less processed foods and sugar. She also has an amazing picky eating course, and also a budget meal planning program.

Jessica Dang: And because she is such a remarkable individual, she gives us lots of great life tips for the kitchen and beyond, like how to help your partner pitch in more around the house. I know you're all excited to learn more about and from Laura. So without further ado, here's our chat. Oh, and don't forget to listen until the very end because we have a special gift for one lucky listener. Laura, welcome to the Cook Smarts podcast. It is such a treat to have you here, especially for back to school season.

Laura Fuentes: Yes, I am so excited. You know we've been online friends for so long, and I'm a huge admirer of what you do. This is really my favorite time of the year, one of them, just because I feel like my expertise is most helpful to a larger group of people. It's just so hard to get started with meals, and packing lunches, especially as a mom. Really, I'm in the trenches with your audience too. So I'm super excited to be here today.

Jessica Dang: Yes, we're excited to get all of your great tips. But before we do, I just want to introduce you to everybody and just talk about, you know, I've admired everything you've done basically since I started Cook Smarts seven years ago. And you've made so many brave changes in your life, from deciding to stay at home with your three kids, to then starting your company Momables while also home schooling your kids at that time. You've written cookbooks. You have this amazing YouTube channel. You're so active on social media. Seriously, I don't know how you manage to be so productive and do so much. Because I think the only reason I was able to get Cook Smarts off the ground was because I didn't have kids yet and had all the time in the world to work 16 hour days. So I just want to know, with such a full plate already, what inspired you to start Momables and how you made this transition into the food world.

Laura Fuentes: You just really summed up like the last 10 years of my life, which is really one huge change after another. And really, we were talking about this right before we got started, but really having a flexible mindset, which I think as parents is something that will make or break your experience at home and as a parent. And so really, that flexibility of the mindset is really what shifted my corporate experience and world, which has nothing to do with food. I'm like you. My background's in global economics, so I had to learn how to cook for myself 13 years ago, well really almost 14, when I was pregnant with my daughter. And really, I struggled because this is before Pinterest and social media, okay?

Laura Fuentes: 14 years ago, I had Food Network. And I had the public library and Barnes & Nobles for books and recipes books. So it was really a matter of trial and error. And then I really just realized, my gosh, cooking is such a process, in the sense of like chicken cooks this way, beef cooks this way. So then I was like, "Wow, I can really understand this," right? So I taught myself how to cook. And then I started a personal blog years ago, before Momables. And I found that people, whenever I shared things about food, and then I feel like I'm really a dinosaur in the blogging world. 12 years ago, it's not like everybody now goes to Pinterest, and you land on a blog, right?

Laura Fuentes: Back then, it was like, wow, people can relate to answering the question of, "How do I pack a sandwich in a lunchbox so it doesn't get soggy, or it doesn't get all mushy. Because also, I know maybe it's shocking to you if you're listening, but 12 years ago, there were no compartments in lunch boxes. We had Ziploc bags, and we had the Rubbermaid or Ziploc lunch containers, you know? Or regular Tupperware. So you really had to figure this stuff out. And I quickly observed that people would come back over and over whenever I shared my tips. And so I just said, "You know what?" I'm going to learn all that I can by watching Food Network and writing things down, trying recipes, and then share it out with the internet.

Laura Fuentes: And that really boils down to how I transitioned into Momables, realizing that there was an opportunity to share this with more people, or moms at that time, that really struggled to pack lunches and make meals for their families.

Jessica Dang: So when you started, was your focus really just on lunches? Or what were you trying to cover? What are the big challenges that you were trying to answer with Momables?

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, when I first started, it answered the, "What do I pack for school lunch?" Question. Right? Because thus the name Momables, like Lunchables, but Momables. I had a two and three year old. And she was three. She was going to preschool a couple of days a week. And we went to the store. She wanted Lunchables. Because they were bright, they were colorful, and all the other kids were eating them. I bought them a couple of times. I share that with people all the time. I'm like, "I bought them, and she didn't like them." But she wanted the container itself. You know, this was before these cool lunch containers we have today.

Laura Fuentes: So I started literally, I would buy some Lunchables. I would take out the meat and cheese and whatever it is that came inside. And I would replace that with better quality deli ham and cheese and real crackers. You know, the stuff, really the versions of what was in there that she actually liked. And then I would take that Glad Press 'N' Seal or plastic wrap, and just wrap it up. And so literally I was reusing Lunchables to create a Momable. And then she's the one that called it a Momable, and then that's how the name stuck.

Jessica Dang: Oh, I didn't know that. That's so great that your daughter was the one that kind of named your company for you.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, she's like, "Oh, you made me a Momable." And I'm like, "Yeah." And then of course, I discovered other lunch containers that were compartmentalized, like EasyLunchboxes were the first ones in the market years ago. So that really made my life easier. And then of course, from that, I started sharing the things that I had found that were helpful, with the audience that I was building online.

Jessica Dang: Yeah, so this was like 10-11 years ago.

Laura Fuentes: Yes, in 2010. Really, online, digitally, like 2010. 2011. I sold our first meal plan in 2012.

Jessica Dang: 2012, okay. Yeah, this is right around the time Cook Smarts started. So we have, yes, very parallel paths in that way. Yeah, and so I don't know what it is. I find that packing lunches for kids is such a challenge. Even as a professional meal planner, I find it really easy to think about dinners, but I still get so stuck with lunches, which is clearly why your company is solving a real challenge.

Jessica Dang: But I think a lot of it is there's restrictions around lunches. At my kids' preschool, teachers don't have the time to warm things up, and there are no nut products allowed. I know in some places, there are no dairy products. So as someone who's had so much experience packing lunches, built an entire company around it, what are some of your tips for making this everyday chore feel less like a chore?

Laura Fuentes: Honestly, I don't see a difference between lunch, dinner, or breakfast. My kids sometimes take scrambled eggs for lunch. So I think the first thing I want to tell people is eliminate the idea that lunches require some type of sandwich, or some type of wrap, or what you would typically find in a, quote, "lunch" menu. When you think of lunch as just another meal, then the possibilities of what you can pack and send are endless. And it's just really a matter of logistics of what container are you going to put the food in? Right?

Jessica Dang: Right.

Laura Fuentes: So if you could just think of it as a normal meal, then you would then go, "Well, what do I need to do to pack ..." The leftovers you have in your fridge from two nights ago are amazing inside of a Thermos container. So I'm a huge promoter of Thermos containers because if it's a winner for dinner, it's a winner for lunch. And it doesn't have to be the very next day. So number one, eliminate the idea that lunch has to be a sandwich. Yes, schools have restrictions of no peanuts, and this and that. But eliminate the "can't have". It's almost like when you're on a diet. Don't think about all the things that you can't have. Open your mind up to the possibilities of all the things that are out there, and you can have and do, right?

Jessica Dang: Oh, I love that. Yes. And I tell people that all the time who've been diagnosed with an allergy. It's like, "Okay, yes. You can't have gluten. But think of all the other things you can still have."

Laura Fuentes: Most foods are gluten free, natural gluten free. But oh my gosh, there's no label on the apple that it's gluten free. Well, I mean, obviously. It's a little trickier with grains. But honestly, for the most part, I tell people, "Even though you have a lot of restrictions, buy a Thermos. A Thermos container, we have two per kid here. I have one child that literally is my hot lunch kid, and he just takes a Thermos everyday with whatever. So I have meatballs in the freezer. I have a lot

of things that are single serving frozen because he's my hot lunch kid. I fear for his wife in the future. But anyway, and then number two, I know your meal plans, you write down the prep, right?

Jessica Dang: Yes.

Laura Fuentes: Lunch also requires, like anything else, a little prep. So invest in a few containers, not just that. You're not going to put together the morning of. Prep the sides. Prep the veggies. Prep the fruit. Prep things that can fill the bulk of your lunch. And then most of the job is done for you. So that's another huge obstacle that people are like, "Oh my gosh. It takes so long in the morning." Well, if you just prep a lot of the stuff the night before, then the morning should be a quick execution of maybe it's chopping the apples, or maybe it's washing something. You know?

Jessica Dang: Yes. And so do you typically pack lunches the morning of? Or how does that process work for you with three kids in the house?

Laura Fuentes: The next things people ... You know my kids are home schooled, number one, for the last couple of years because of my company, our schedule, and opportunities. But I still pack lunch every single day because people have to eat, and mom's at the office. And my kids do get, basically they go to a center a few days a week to get ... They kind of go to college, but regular school. So they go to a place where they're nine to three. And it's almost like they go to their lecture, and they get the material, and they come home and do it. So I still have to pack lunch. For the kid that likes to eat hot lunch, everything is prepped the night before, or a couple of days before, or in the freezer, and then I just warm up in the morning. Mornings are for assembly. I'm not caffeinated enough to pack something from scratch.

Jessica Dang: Yeah, I agree too. I try to have as much done the night before. So would you go into the week with a plan of what lunches are going to look like? I guess maybe just tell me about your meal planning process and maybe what a Momables plan looks like.

Laura Fuentes: Our plan assumes that you go into the week, you're going to tackle this so that you can have easy meals throughout the week, where you're going to do a lot of the prep over the weekend. Or we actually break down the prep, just like you, throughout the week as well. But all of it, you have the option of prepping on Sunday, for the most part. So I prep my dinners, most of my dinners, and then our lunch plans, also I'll have like what to prep and how to make it ahead. For example, you can send a grilled sandwich to school. You just have to prep it the night before. And in the morning, you just grill, let it cool down, and then assemble it into the lunchbox.

Laura Fuentes: So all of it is broken down into the least amount of work to do right before the meal, right? So I kind of go at it with, "What am I making for dinner?" And then,

"How do I reinvent that into lunch?" And then a couple of times a week, my kids have sandwiches. Even though one of them doesn't eat sandwiches. But the point is, a couple of times a week it's like peanut butter and jelly or a ham sandwich whatever's around.

Jessica Dang: And you try ... So it sounds like you have one kid that likes the hot lunches. So do you pack different lunches for all of them depending on their preferences? Or do you try your best to be like, "You guys are all eating the same thing."

Laura Fuentes: Oh my gosh, I try my best for everyone to eat the same. So, like, I made a huge pot of ... I live outside of New Orleans. So there's something called dirty rice, which my kids love. And literally, my youngest has taken dirty rice to camp everyday this week. Today we're Wednesday, so for three days in a row, in a Thermos. And the other one too it one day, and then skipped a day, had a sandwich, and then took it.

Laura Fuentes: And I know it's hard for a lot of parents because they're listening and going like, "Yeah." But my kids? Something different everyday. Or each kid likes something different. So you know what? Take a few different things, and then you mix and match. But the idea is to really simplify how many different things that you pack. Or I have, like I told you earlier, I have single serve meatballs frozen in my freezer. I have frozen peanut butter sandwiches, frozen ham and cheese sandwiches. My freezer is my friend. And so that is really another key to executing packing lunches really quickly.

Jessica Dang: So what you're saying is a little bit of planning, getting those freezer meals, makes a huge difference in terms of executing lunch.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, and they don't have to be like freezer meals, like what we think of dinner freezer meals, you know? Where like you try things that go in the Crock-Pot. I'm talking about you just made dinner, and you've got six meatballs left over, well your kid's going to eat three at lunch. Hey, that's two future lunches, as opposed to putting the meatballs in the refrigerator for another night. Because I'm like, "Six meatballs is not going to feed my family of five." Okay? Let's be real. And I didn't double the recipe, but these make great lunches. So that's how I end up with a lot of single serve life savers in my freezer.

Jessica Dang: Oh, that's so smart. Because I think a lot of people, if they had just a few meatballs left over, it would end up back in the fridge, and then nobody would eat it, and then eventually it would spoil, and they'd toss it out. But you're seeing that as an opportunity for the future. So you're always thinking ahead, it sounds like.

Laura Fuentes: Totally. I don't even clean up and put it in the fridge for the week unless it has a purpose for lunches. If not, things get immediately frozen.

Jessica Dang: Yeah. That's so smart. Yeah, my husband, he has this habit of leaving me two things. It's like two bites of something. And I'm like, "Why did you just not eat this?" So yes, you've identified where things can actually be put away and help you in a future scenario.

Laura Fuentes: Totally repurpose. That's really, I'm the Queen of Leftovers. That's how I became really focused on lunch. Because I was like, "Lunch is just an opportunity for me to get rid of this food." You know? Like a roast from dinner. You know what? I made your poke bowl recipe from your meal plan, I think probably like a year ago, like a staple. The marinade is like the best poke bowls out there. And it's so simple too. But now I turn it into a dressing. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh. This is the best as dressing." So I just stretched it out. I made it into an amazing salad dressing. Or we had extra pineapple. I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to use that pineapple in salads for this week." You know?

Jessica Dang: Yes, I think a lot of it is just thinking just more creatively. And I think a lot of times, parents are just exhausted. And so the last thing they want to do is having to think more creatively. But that's why having a meal plan service, like Momables and Cook Smarts, makes so much sense because we have to kind of take that creative work away from you. But at the same time, the more you do it, the more you start to identify these patterns for yourself too.

Laura Fuentes: Right. I mean, a lot of people come to you and me thinking, "Oh, I'm lost when it comes to planning and prepping." I just really, oh my gosh, I don't have a food background. I started because I subscribe to another company's, like 15 years ago, to a meal plan, so I would know how to do all this stuff. And gain that confidence in the kitchen of like, "Is my chicken done? Is my pork done?" Which your course teaches really well. You know? Like all those basics, I didn't have them. So I realized, "Hey, I need the help, and I need someone else to help me do that for a tiny minimal fee." You know?

Jessica Dang: Yeah. It makes so much sense for some ... There are some things, like we just were talking earlier before, before we hit record, it's like as business owners there are some things that are just not worth our time, that we can have a professional do it, and it makes such a huge difference in our lives.

Laura Fuentes: Totally.

Jessica Dang: So I love leftovers. I am someone that loves having them for lunch. I do find that my kids and I've heard this from other parents too. They have trouble getting their kids to have leftovers for lunch. So for parents that are in that boat, what are your recommendations for them?

Laura Fuentes: Okay. Leftovers. You are never going to call leftovers "leftovers". Leftovers are called starters. They're meal starters. Leftovers are really the beginning of a new meal. So it's like the two meatballs. You're like, "What do I do with those?" Well, now you're out of pasta. Well, I send my kid with two meatballs only. It doesn't

have to be spaghetti and meatballs. It could just be the meatballs only, along with half an apple and then some crackers or something else. We think so hard on how to ... It's an all or nothing. It's really not an all or nothing. It's just this plus that. So I also don't serve leftovers, the exact same thing, the very next day. Because then they do feel like leftovers, right?

Jessica Dang: Yes.

Laura Fuentes: So if you just had chicken burgers or turkey burgers for dinner and you're like, "Oh, we have one burger patty left over. No one's going to eat that." I'm like, well, actually, maybe not the next day. But just skip a day. And then chop it up on top of a salad and make into a burger salad. You have a salad as a base, and you can put the burger, and some pickles and tomatoes. Essentially like a burger in a bowl or something. I think we forget that we have to feed ourselves too. You know, and no one wants to eat that leftover burger patty. So it's just a starter for something else.

Laura Fuentes: By the way, you're listening, I'm sorry, but I am the eternal optimist. So it's like everything to me is like, "Oh, that's so much fun. We're going to start this." You know? So leftovers are not downers. They're uppers. They're really ... skip a day, for sure.

Jessica Dang: Yes. I love that. I think that you're able to see the opportunity in everything. And yeah, so much of it is about just breathing new life into leftovers so that they can be the starter for a new meal. And we have this whole infographic that's about our guide to repurposing leftovers. So, exactly, you turn that burger patty into a topping for a salad, or something to put into a burrito. There are just so many ways.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, your infographics are amazing, by the way. I think I've shared a lot with the one that How Long Do Leftovers Last? It might have a different title.

Jessica Dang: The Freezer Guide. That's a question that I've had, like, "How long can I freeze this for?" You know? It's like, "I've had this in the freezer for three years. Can I still eat it?"

Laura Fuentes: Again, a lot of it is just knowledge of what to do with it, which is something that you and I really go out there and try to answer for people.

Jessica Dang: Yeah. So one of the questions for, especially for folks that are going back to school, kids going back to school, and they've never packed lunches, one of the questions they have is really around containers. So you are a big fan of Thermoses. Are there any other containers that you recommend that parents should have in their lunch packing arsenal?

Laura Fuentes: I am a big fan of one container with multiple compartments person because no matter the age, kids, they just really like their food separate and nothing

squished. And presentation is so key. So there are a few, whether you like plastic or stainless steel. I like also the kind that have a single lid because it makes it easier. So for example, you have EasyLunchboxes, which is a plastic one. You have Lunchbox, which is a metal stainless steel one. I actually have a video, as you said mentioned earlier, I have YouTube. I love doing video because I love showing people a visual of what you can fit in each container.

Laura Fuentes: So I do have a video, I have two, on the best lunch containers, on my favorites. And they've evolved over time. But there is something for everyone out there. So, again, don't spend a lot on containers until you really know that one works for your child. And also, practice. Have your child ... If this is the first time you're packing lunches, have your child practice or eat out of a container, learn how to open it and close it before school starts. So start packing their lunches at home before school starts so that they get used to where their food is, how you're going to pack it. You also learn how long things will hold out. You want to separate crackers from the ham and the cheese because they'll absorb moisture, and then they get soggy. So that's why I think containers with compartments are really great.

Jessica Dang: Yes, and I hear that stuff you learn after packing a few lunches, or from a lunch packing veteran like yourself. Because, yeah, people don't realize like, "Oh, I shouldn't put lettuce on the bread, a sandwich, because that makes the bread soggy and not very good by the time noon hits and people have to unpack their lunch." So where can people find these videos you're talking about?

Laura Fuentes: So you go to YouTube/Momables, M-O-M-A-B-L-E-S. You will see I do release a taco video every Tuesday. Well, I have been. They'll end soon. But essentially, there's taco recipes. There's meals. There's salads. And then there's an entire lunch how to section where it's like the best lunch containers, how to pack yogurt in the lunch box, how to freeze smoothies. A lot of the questions that people ask us, they're all there. You know, the top five Thermos containers. Not all Thermoses are the same. Some have a wider mouth. Some have a small mouth. You know, Thermoses, they have different temperature gauges, based on the stainless steel. So really, all that stuff is on YouTube, and of course on Momables.com. But on YouTube if you want a video, or just Google. I'm sure, Jess, you'll put some links in the show notes for the helpful videos. But yeah, essentially, everything you want to know about how to pack lunches, it's in YouTube.

Jessica Dang: Yes. Everyone should go to your YouTube channel. Because last year was when I first started packing lunches. My daughter started a preschool that was not providing lunches. And I went onto your YouTube channel and just watched everything about lunch packing. And it was so helpful, especially the lunch containers. Because that was, to me like, "Oh, I have to get the right container so she'll want to eat her lunch." And it is true about what you mentioned, that tip of making sure they can open it. Because there were some containers that I bought ... So I bought like a ton on Amazon, just to kind of do my own testing.

And there were some that I was like, "There's no way a three year old can do this on her own." And yes, she could ask a teacher. Of course there's people there helping her. But it was, I think, really important to me that she could feel like she could open her lunch box on her own.

Laura Fuentes: Right. A lot of time things would come home uneaten, and I'd asked my son, "Why didn't you eat this?" He'd be like, "Couldn't get it open." I'm like, "Ohhh." And when he did go to regular school years ago, they had a policy where teachers really weren't able to assist with the food or whatever. So I learned really quickly like, "Oh, this Thermos container is just not going to work for him because his hands aren't big enough to open it." Or, "I really need a Thermos container with a rubberized grip on the top because they can hold it better, right? And a lot of it is just trying it at home before you send your child out to eat. You know?"

Jessica Dang: Oh, that makes so much sense, doing a test run or even serving some lunches probably out of those containers before school starts and just getting them used to unzipping their lunch bag, and taking the containers out, and eating off them. That's such a smart idea.

Laura Fuentes: Right? And then there is the question of whether or not they'll eat it. But that's a different topic, on picky eaters, I don't know.

Jessica Dang: Yes. Well, actually since you mentioned picky eaters, I think we can switch gears a little bit and talk about that. I love that you've been really honest about the fact that you've had some really big challenges helping your kids, especially your daughter, overcome picky eating. And I think people assume that, "Oh, you're in the food biz. You get a free pass on that." But it's so not true. I think kids are who they are and picky eating is such a universal problem that so many parents face. So can you talk more about your journey, what you tried, what you learned, and what you're still learning?

Laura Fuentes: Yeah. Gosh, as a matter of fact, I'm very open about it, that my daughter was very picky at first. She was my carb person. Now she eats all sorts of vegetables. And I knew I was onto something one day, when she said, "Can I trade my meatballs for broccoli?" Because she doesn't like the texture of meat. And I was like, "Yes!" And then now broccoli is her favorite thing. My son actually is the one that I spent seven years going through therapy with. We sought out professional help because just like we were talking about meal planning and everything else, there are things as a parent where even though my pediatrician assured me that it was normal, and if you have a picky eater, it is normal that your child asserts their independence and their own choices. It's natural that they become selective about what they eat.

Laura Fuentes: But with our son, we really had a clinical problem where he didn't like the texture of certain foods. And so therefore, he eliminated entire food groups. Or

I know a lot of parents who have kids who will only eat a certain color of food, and they won't touch green. There are really things that are beyond a stage.

Jessica Dang: And how early did you see this? Or how early did you know this was beyond, yeah, you said a stage, and something that you guys needed to seek professional help on?

Laura Fuentes: At the age of three or four is when I started noticing certain things. Like he would complain, "My tummy hurts." He would stop eating. We also had gluten intolerances. We could have an entire podcast on picky eating.

Jessica Dang: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I will invite you back when we do cover that specific ... We have covered that topic, but I definitely want to hear it from your perspective too.

Laura Fuentes: But there are a lot of reasons why a child may be clinically picky eater. A lot of it has to do with food allergies and how, when they're very young, they really can't express how food makes them feel. So they associate food with stomachaches or headaches, which really is an intolerance, right? So imagine that you go to an Italian restaurant, and you overeat, and you walk out and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so stuffed." Right? We've all had that time in our life where we just really overate and felt almost sick.

Laura Fuentes: So if you think about a child who can't express or even link the, "I eat this specific thing," because they're not developed enough to realize, "Oh, it may be gluten. Or it may be dairy. Or it may be whatever it is." And it makes them feel bad. So they just really start fearing food as a whole, or trying new things, because they're really not sure how that food is going to make them feel internally. So they have stomach aches or cramps. A lot of kids, constipation is a huge issue for many kids, which is really ... It's not about fiber. It's really about the type of food.

Laura Fuentes: So all of these things were signs that I was really watching in my son, and at a time where I was really frustrated because here I was, starting a business to help people eat more of a variety of foods, and in my own house, I felt like I was really out of control. So we went to a feeding therapist. I had a child psychologist. I really invested a lot of time and money because it's a big financial commitment to really seek help. And does my son eat everything today? No. But really, he is more open to things, and I've gained a big understanding of the process and techniques, things that really work, and things that don't work, and how to implement those changes at home. You know, just really an entire ... my life changed once I changed how I was approaching a lot of these things, you know?

Laura Fuentes: And so that's why I tell parents, "It can be a stage. But it can stick for a long time. Even if your child is not, there's nothing clinically wrong with them, it can stay because we are also continuing to feed that habit of being very selective.

Jessica Dang: Yes. Exactly. And I know you have the whole course on this, on what parents can do if they are dealing with this. And again, it's like yes, it can be a stage. But it can be a very long drawn out stage. So for those with a picky child, you should definitely check out Laura's course on Momables.com. But what are some things that parents can do to just make this feel not so daunting or so overwhelming in their lives? Because, you know, kids have to eat multiple times a day. It's the way parents even we're set to nurture through food. And it is just really heard, both emotionally and mentally.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, so one of the things that I tell parents is like, number one, remember that you are the parent. So therefore, you're going to dictate how things are run in your house, right? So if you already, whether you're seeking out meal planning help, or you're just cooking your own meals, you're already determining what kinds of foods are going to be brought into your home. Now, there are preferences by our picky eaters on how they are served, or whether or not they'll eat it. So my biggest tip is, number one, just make the food. There are many times where I know, in my mind, I'm like, Ugh, my kid's not going to eat this particular meal. But I'm going to make it anyway. I am going to serve it at the table. But I am also going to make sure that there's one item at the table that this particular child will eat.

Laura Fuentes: So there were many nights where my son, he only had a big bowl of rice and three pieces of the chicken minus the sauce and the vegetables. But think of a stir fry, right? So he would only pick out the chicken. And you know what? It was okay because I did my job as parent making a healthy and fresh meal. That's my job. Their job is to choose to eat it or not. Right? So often we get very frustrated because they won't try it. We're trying to negotiate. We're trying to, "Just will you take a bite?" Or we have all these rules, which, in a way, they make the eating environment not a positive one. And it's not very inviting for them to try new stuff when there are so many rules and restrictions, right? Because kids, they learn, they know exactly what to expect at the dinner table.

Laura Fuentes: So the number one rule, even in our course, is understand what your role as a parent is, which is to provide a healthy and fresh food for your family. And that's it. Your job ends when you serve the food at the table. And then their job starts with their selection of food. Right? So a lot of times, we get really upset when our kids won't eat our food, or they say negative things. And those are all the things that we cover in the course. But essentially, it's like no. You did your job. Pat yourself on the back. You made the meal. Right?

Laura Fuentes: And that's where it really ends. One meal, given that everything else that you provide throughout the day, they're good options, one meal is not going to make or break your child's nutritional deficiencies or not. That's why I always try to explain to parents, "Don't put so much pressure on dinner. Distribute the veggies and distribute the fruit, and everything else throughout the day." That's why one of my rules for lunch, like we spoke earlier, is like, "Lunch is not about a sandwich. It's all sorts of foods." Right? So when you are able to throw all their

meals into lunch, or the items that you might think of as traditionally dinner, then the pressure of if they just eat a bowl of rice for dinner, and two pieces of chicken, it's okay because they already ate all their foods at lunch. Right?

Jessica Dang: Yes, I totally agree with that. And I think I have a pediatrician friend of mine told me that, "Expect just one good meal. That's all you really need for most children because by the time they hit two, their growing has slowed down from when they were babies, when they're really doubling in size." And so from a nutritional standpoint, one good meal really is all they need. So just, yeah. And often dinner is the time that parents are with their kids. My kids are in care during the day, and I know that they actually eat really well in care and sometimes don't eat as well at dinner. That's because you're right. They've gotten what they needed for the day and just kind of want to hang out with us or do something else instead.

Laura Fuentes: Well, also we put a lot of pressure at dinner. And it's something that our kids really, honestly, there are cues. They pick up on this. And dinner, we're all really tired. You and I, we work full time, so we've had a long day at work, our temper is a little shorter. Kids also had a lot day at school, camp. Plus look at kids today. They're going to school. It's like going to a full time job, right? They go to school all day. And then we chauffeur them to activities. So they got an hour or two of swim practice or soccer or whatever it is. They're just tired and cranky. Probably they just don't want to voice it. But they just want to lay down. Right? How many nights have you gotten to bed and go like, "Oh my gosh, I thought this moment would never come." Right? As a mom? We're exhausted.

Jessica Dang: Yes. Yes, yes. I want to head to bed so much earlier than my kids do.

Laura Fuentes: Right. I started going to bed with the kids a few years ago. But that's a different story. I'm like, gosh, kids, honestly, they're just so tired at the end of the day. And we put so much pressure on making that one meal count that it's like, "Hey." It's just exactly what your pediatrician friend said, like just make another meal count. There are amazing breakfast eaters. There's nothing wrong with a veggie omelet, or a quiche, something that you can prep ahead of time for breakfast. It doesn't have to be toast and cereal. It could be something that could be just warmed up and reheated.

Jessica Dang: Yeah, totally. And I love that you've come at this from really an empathy standpoint of you're empathizing with your kids. They're tired. And so let's just lay off of them at dinner, which we don't have to play all these negotiation and pressure and strategies. And it makes everybody's experience so much better.

Laura Fuentes: And you guys, for you listening, things aren't perfect at dinnertime. I've lost my senses at dinner many, many times. But these are things that I learned years of going to therapy, not just with my kid but for myself and how to become a better parent at meal times. And a lot of it, it was like the things that I cannot control my child, but I can control me, and most importantly, how I approach

dinner. Like the dinner environment that we set up at home, how our meals are eaten. I just bring everything out. I let people serve themselves. I ask them, "Would you like some of this?" And my son says, "No." Well, now he'll say like, "No, thank you." And then I don't go like, "But try it. Just one bite. What if you like it?" I just take his answer as like he, "No." No is no, right?

Laura Fuentes: I teach my sons, in the future, when a woman says no, or when somebody tells you no, that's a hard stop. So when my child says no, that's a hard stop as well. I stop negotiating. I stop bribing. I stop talking about dessert. That's it. But I did my job. I offered.

Jessica Dang: I love that analogy, that you've kind of been teaching them about consent. And that you've tied it into dinnertime. That is great.

Laura Fuentes: No means no in all areas of our life. I'm not going to take credit for this. This is one of our therapists. But she's like, "As a parent, you're sending your child a lot of mixed messages. If no ..." Even at a very ... I know we're not trying to teach our sons about consent at the age of four, for example. But it is something that we talk about down the road. Early age, when they say, "No, I don't want any," or they just said the word "no" and you don't respect it, you're saying, "But X, Y, and Z." What does that say in other areas of their life? And the funny thing is, is that we teach them down the road that, "No means no," and there is no buts, and ifs, and maybes, or whatnots, right?

Laura Fuentes: So it's the same thing at meal time. And that was a really hard lesson for me as a parent. Because I was like, "Oh my gosh. What could this mean? I'm a mom of boys." And it was very eye opening to me. So again, and it's tough. A lot of it is lessons that I had to, honestly, I felt like couples therapy, mom therapy. But they gave me that empathy for my child, of how to make meal times better. It's not about perfection or getting our kids to eat. It's about setting up positive eating habits that, they carry on for a lifetime.

Jessica Dang: Yeah. I want to thank your therapist for me. Because I feel like that was a moment of clarity for me, the way that she phrased that. It's like, "Oh my gosh. I never thought about it that way, but that makes so much sense."

Laura Fuentes: So happy that was helpful.

Jessica Dang: Yes. Okay, so switching gears again, as the CEO of my household, when I travel for work, I have to do so much planning to make sure everyone stays alive, they get where they need to go, all are going to be fed. And it is really stressful. There's so much work to do, and I know you now travel a ton for work. And your husband quit his corporate job a few years ago to help you run Momables and your entire media brand. So he often is the parent responsible for the household while you're gone. So I have two questions here, and I think a lot of parents listening are really going to want to know these answers. How did you get to the point where more of the household responsibilities got shared? And

of course feel free to share any growing pains you had. And then, two, walk us through your process for getting things organized when you leave for a trip.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah. That was a hard one to go over time. Because I didn't just leave for one night. I often leave for a whole week. I've had three week media stints. Honestly, it's really been a learning ... When I first started traveling, my husband was working full time in health care. So with an hour commute. So he had ... I started traveling way before he quit his corporate job. So what I was doing at that time, when he was working, and I was traveling, clearly, we had to have either hired help, or family that his mom ... I would leave town and my mother-in-law would come. And she loved it because she got uninterrupted time with her grandkids. So she came and stayed with him for a few days to help him out because he worked.

Laura Fuentes: And so at the very beginning, I used to leave. Literally, I would leave basically meals where it was like heat and eat. I would also have flexible nights where it was like a frozen pizza for dinner, or just really depending on how many days a week I would leave. Thermos, lunches. Oh my gosh, there were lists and post-its. So it was really overwhelming at the beginning because it was like, "How is someone else going to do the things that I do in five days while I'm gone?" And then I learned to let some of it go. And that was huge.

Jessica Dang: That is so hard for any mom. I think we're all control freaks. We think no one is going to do it the way that we're going to do it.

Laura Fuentes: And you know what? They don't. It's just like when your kid goes to daycare, and you get your kid back, and you're like, "Ugh. Their diaper is so wet. Did they not notice it an hour before we left?" Or like, "Their clothes are not put on the same way." But at the end of the day, your kid's healthy, and it's alive. And they have a diaper on, so it's good to go, right? That's how I've caught on. I really started to let go. And I learned a lot of that through the therapy because of feeding, you know? It was just a lot about letting go of that control mindset, which is very hard. So how I transitioned from killing myself, literally, two nights before my trip, which was very stressful, to I would go to the grocery. I would prep. I would freeze. I had post-its on everything. I would have a meal schedule.

Laura Fuentes: I started stepping back a little and going, "You know what?" I would ask my mother-in-law if she came to sleep, you know, if you have somebody that comes and that you're hiring to help out, what are the things that they would like to serve that they know your kids will eat? And you just make sure that you have those ingredients there. It's a lot about communication with the person that's going to be there caring for your child, right? And then eventually, once I started experiencing how freeing it was for me, or how relieved I was to not prep every meal and plan everything out. I was like, "Whew, I'm not doing that again." So I literally started making sure that we were stocked with food and ingredients that could make quick and easy meals.

Laura Fuentes: Honestly, if you don't have junk in your house, they're not going to be eating junk all the time, right? And also, and then I was like, "You know what? My kids eat really well when I'm home. If they're eating pizza, or my husband decides to get Chinese food from their favorite restaurant down the road one night while I'm gone, they're going to survive, right?" I took the healthy path of least resistance there. So, again, I don't know if you can realize, but a lot of the things that were going wrong in my house were because of me because I was fighting the resistance. And once I let go of a lot of these control things, which I think as an entrepreneur, as a working mom, it was something that was a problem for me, things just really got easier.

Jessica Dang: Yes. There's so much growth that happens if you're just willing to delegate and know that someone else, they may not do it the same as you do it, but it will get done.

Laura Fuentes: So when it comes to food, I really let go. I made sure my house was stocked with things that were easy to heat up. Or if you're married, a lot of people listening may not be married to a spouse that's willing to cook. Then remember I talked about meatballs or lasagna, or whatever it is. Have that stuff in the freezer. Or slow cooker meals, also are very helpful, that kind of thing. But then the other household chores, we've always been kind of ... I wouldn't say 50/50. But in some things, he did a lot of. Some other things, I did everything. And then when I travel, honestly, if my kids have no clean underwear, that wasn't my problem. I did my part. I left, stuff was done. It was like, that's either the kid's problem or the husband's problem.

Laura Fuentes: Honestly, you know, even we just moved into our new house a couple of days ago. And my son said, "I have no clean underwear." My husband's like, "Oh my god." He's stressing out. I was like, "Listen, son. You either go to camp with board shorts because they have a liner in them."

Jessica Dang: Right, built in, yes.

Laura Fuentes: "Or you're going to have to re-use yesterday's, okay? What else can I tell you?" And so he was like, "Oh my God." He's the hot food kid. So he was like, "What?" I was like,

Jessica Dang: I love it. That's a genius mom trick. Just send them in swim trunks. It's fine. They have their built in underwear.

Laura Fuentes: "It's not water day today? What happened?" I'm just kidding. But it really is about letting go of that perfection. I've really just embraced all the imperfect things and the responsibilities. Like, if things don't get done, they don't get done. There's a pile of laundry at the floor. If I don't have clean socks, I'll just go sockless. You know? It's not about having to do everything at the same time. You get it done eventually.

Jessica Dang: Yeah. No, I agree with that. And that day, like now with social media and everyone trying to convey these perfect images, I try to show when I get takeout, or do something that people wouldn't expect of me because I'm a professional meal planner. It's like, "No, we all have days where things kind of fall apart. And it's totally okay."

Laura Fuentes: Yeah.

Jessica Dang: Totally okay.

Laura Fuentes: That's like all the time over here, so it's like, "Whew." I keep it together though.

Jessica Dang: And your kids, remind me of your kids' age. Because they're now kind of old enough that they can fend for themselves too. You've gotten to the point, you've taught them enough that they are not going to starve when you leave them.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, my daughter, I'm like, "Listen." So here is a good thing. So I'll go back to a tip. Here's something you can implement. We got rid of our toaster a long time ago and got a toaster oven. Because right when our daughter was seven or eight, she could make quesadillas, or ... And honestly, a lot of nights when I was traveling, she'd be in charge of like, "Oh, you want a turkey quesadilla? Or you want a ham quesadilla?" Let's face it. It was an open tortilla with cheese and ham or whatever. But she felt proud that she got to make that for her and her brothers, right? So I was like, "Go for it."

Laura Fuentes: So in a lot of ways, empowering our kids to make those decisions of not a perfect meal. Honestly, who cares? You know? And now she's more adventurous. And she can follow recipes. But when you're in your trenches, and your kids are two and five, I know it's rough. And you feel like it's like sink or swim every freaking day. So if you're listening and that's you, it really does get better as they get older. But I do feel like it's so important at that age to set the example of, "We're going to be flexible, and things aren't always going to be perfect." And I tell my kids all the time, what's most important is that you're healthy, and that you're happy. Everything else can figure itself out.

Jessica Dang: Yeah, and I love what you just mentioned with your son and also your daughter. You've put the responsibility on them too. They're not grown ups yet. But they are capable of lots of things, and just giving them that chance to understand that, by being away, or by giving them some responsibility to make their own dinner, or figure out what to do about their dirty underwear situation. And also, for your husband too, I sometimes think about like, "Oh, he might not view it as an opportunity, but it's an opportunity for him to learn and also see this is all the stuff I have to do when no one's looking."

Laura Fuentes: Now, and he may not do the things the way I do them. But you know what? I'll let that stuff go too. I'm like, "Hey, they get done." Honestly, he may not fold my

underwear if he does laundry. But, heck, the laundry got done. He is like, "I don't know how to fold these things." And I'm like, "It's a thong. You just fold like three ways. It's not a big deal."

Jessica Dang: You don't even need to fold that. It's fine. Just throw it in the drawer.

Laura Fuentes: It's more like, "Who cares? But I got clean underwear." So do you know what I'm saying? Like is too short to be grumpy and I gave up ... I mean, maybe I've had way too much therapy because of my kids' eating. But I let all of that go. And it just made me so much happier to let go of that perfection. And, "Does he load the dishwasher this way?" Well, heck, I don't care. The stuff got put in, and it's clean. It got put away, at least.

Laura Fuentes: So anyway, delegating is huge. And then, of course, if I tell my kids to like, they've been emptying the dishwasher for a long time. Not willingly, but I do ask them. And they kind of like, groan. I'm like, "Oh, what? Oh, you want to eat with a clean fork? Oh, that's awesome. It needs to be put away." The thing is, is that after they do it, and I say, "Thank you so much for emptying the dishwasher for me. It really helps me out when you do that." So they're like, "Oh." Right?

Laura Fuentes: So I might have nagged them for like 10 minutes to get up and go do that one thing. But then I need to reinforce that thing that they did was helpful to me, and therefore they feel that slight bit of ping or, "Ooh. Okay." So then it reinforces a behavior that I want them to do more willingly down the road, or something that honestly, they should be doing. Because we don't have to do everything for everyone in our house.

Jessica Dang: Oh, I think that more moms need to hear that more often and really integrate that, and actually put it into practice. Because I think that's so hard. I think we all know that we do not need to do everything. My new saying is, "Yeah, moms can't have it all, but we have to do it all." That shouldn't be true either. We should learn to not have to do it all.

Laura Fuentes: No, we really don't. There's a house with a roof with four walls. And there are other human beings that live in it. And my responsibility is to make sure that they're happy, and healthy, and everything else is like, it takes a team. It's like running a company. It takes a team to execute and do the things that we do. So does a house. Honestly, I don't want the pressure of making sure everything is done all the time, and perfect. Forget it. You know, "You were complaining you have no clean underwear? Well, you should have told me when you had none left in your drawer. I got enough. So I wasn't looking out for your drawer."

Jessica Dang: What? You're not going through everybody's underwear drawer every day to make sure that they have clean underwear?

Laura Fuentes: No, that's not my problem. You're eight. Hello? You know? Or, "Oh, wait. There's no more of the snacks that you like? Well then maybe you should've

told me about it so I could've added it to the list." A lot of us moms, I'm sure you have a lot of people listening that are, they work. Like, you wouldn't treat the people in your office and do everything for them. Because they have a job to do too, right? They have responsibilities. At my house, you've got a job to do too because I have a ton of jobs.

Jessica Dang: Also it's helpful to your child, right? My biggest lesson from parenting so far, and I have two and a four year old, and this baby that doesn't do a whole lot yet. But it's like kids can do a lot more than you think they can. They are really capable. And the age that mine are, they don't really complain too much about when you're asking them to do stuff because they think it's fun. It's like adult stuff that they get to do.

Laura Fuentes: Totally, so at two, for example. I'm going to give you an example, laundry. Can a two year old really help with laundry? Well, I used to take this wet stuff, if you don't have a front loader, like I didn't have a front loader. So I would take the wet stuff out of the washer, and put it back in the laundry basket on the floor next to my two year old, and make him stand. And I would say, "Okay, you need to throw this stuff. It's a throwing game. You need to throw this stuff in the dryer." While they were doing that, I was probably folding the stuff that had been sitting in the dryer for too long, on top of the washer. And I just, when they're five, I'm like, "Hey, can you go ..." They're learning how to match the socks and all this stuff. They don't always do it willingly. But, I mean, I'm doing it. So you're going to do it with me.

Laura Fuentes: So at two, like you said, there's a lot of things. We're making them match. We spend so money on games, on all these educational resources, you know? Teaches our kids to match shapes and do this. I'm like, "Heck, all you got to do is empty the dishwasher and put the silverware in the drawer. That's matching shapes, you know?"

Jessica Dang: Oh, yes. They love that game at my house.

Laura Fuentes: Right. You don't have to give them glass. You know? So anyway, there's a lot of age appropriate things that you can do, that I call delegate. But I tell them it's part of their job. I mean, if you're listening, I really do a lot of other things in the house I don't tell my kids to do everything. I mean, I need to prepare my kids for when they're older and they are adult humans.

Jessica Dang: Yeah, that's the biggest job as a parent, is to teach your kids how to be adults. And that includes meal planning and figuring out how to cook a dinner because that's part of being an adult, is feeding yourself, and hopefully feeding yourself in a healthy way.

Laura Fuentes: If they can read, they can read a recipe. They don't have to cook it. But we used to print out our recipes, which yours print out as well. And they can tell you what's the next step. And they're seven, they have to do reading. They can

practice reading. They can learn about fractions by measuring stuff. Yes, they make a little bit of a mess, and they're not as neat as we are. But you're going to be cleaning up anyway. So what's a little bit more mess. You know?

Jessica Dang: Yes. Totally. Yeah. All that stuff, the mess, things taking a little bit longer than you would take to do it, those are just all investments in the future that they will learn to do at an earlier age. And hopefully, that'll be their task and not yours in the future.

Laura Fuentes: Right, it totally takes a lot longer for my 13 year old to empty the dishwasher than it takes me. But you know what? Someone else is doing it. So I really don't care. I mean, it's not my time. It's her time. It's a different approach to things that thanks to a lot of years of feeding therapy, and I was like, "Oh, wow. I don't have to do everything." But honestly, with that mentality is how I approach a lot of what we do in our Picky Eaters programs and our Kick Start, which is eliminating processed foods and sugars. It's kind of like Whole30, but for families. You know, we want to make so many changes in our lives. And we don't know how to do it because we can control ourselves, but we don't know how to implement it with our kids. And so a lot of what I focus over the last seven years is building our programs that really empower you as a parent to make the changes that you want to see happen at home.

Jessica Dang: I love that. So just remind people where can they find these programs?

Laura Fuentes: You can find everything and anything on Momables.com. On the header, you'll see like you have Picky Eaters. Basically, tell me what you're struggling with, and then we can help you.

Jessica Dang: Okay. Well, you mentioned that you are in the middle of a move. So thank you for joining us even though I think things are clearly very chaotic in your life right now. But this is part of a decision that your family has made to downsize your house. We could all spend more time and money on family experiences and travel. So congratulations. That's so exciting.

Laura Fuentes: Thank you.

Jessica Dang: And I just love that you're making life work on your family's terms. You know, your priorities, your values, and it's definitely made me think more about what I want for my kids as they get older. I mean, it's just like by simplifying your life, you guys simplified your meal planning, and you've made it actually much more rich. That's so great.

Laura Fuentes: Right.

Jessica Dang: Perfect. Okay, so Laura, it's been so awesome talking to you today. And I want to give you our rapid fire round of questions.

Laura Fuentes: Okay.

Jessica Dang: And so we can end with that. Okay, you ready?

Laura Fuentes: Yes.

Jessica Dang: Okay, your most important kitchen tool?

Laura Fuentes: My blender, my Blendtec. It does everything ... I can consolidate a lot of appliances, and you and I are probably appliance junkies. But a really great blender. It will do everything you need it to do, most part.

Jessica Dang: All right. I have to hear more about that offline because I actually don't have a blender.

Laura Fuentes: But you have a food processor, and you have a mixer, and you have all these things that your blender could do.

Jessica Dang: Oh. Okay, I got to hear more about this then. Okay, your go-to breakfast?

Laura Fuentes: For me, for years, it's been Bulletproof pot coffee because I intermittent fast. And I have a whole blog post on [LauraFuentes.com](#) on the benefits of Bulletproof coffee for women, or fat coffee. It doesn't have to be the brand Bulletproof. So I'm a big promoter of, I think five years, six years, now. Otherwise, eggs.

Jessica Dang: Okay. Yes, I'm an egg girl. I don't drink coffee, but I've been hearing more about Bulletproof coffee so now I'm kind of curious.

Laura Fuentes: And you can blend tea. So you can make fat tea as well.

Jessica Dang: Oh, I like the fat aspect of it. So I'll have to give it a try. Hey, you have 15 minutes to make a meal. What is it?

Laura Fuentes: For my family, if it's 15 minutes, breakfast for dinner or tacos, for sure. For myself, it's a five minute, it's like a big salad bowl.

Jessica Dang: I'm there with you on that. What is one meal you never get sick of?

Laura Fuentes: Poke bowls, thanks to your recipe.

Jessica Dang: Mmmm. Thank you. Yes, I love a good poke bowl. One ingredient you always have in your pantry?

Laura Fuentes: White rice.

Jessica Dang: Oh, yes. As a Chinese person that is also something we always have in our pantry too.

Laura Fuentes: Also five minute cook rice, or quick rice?

Jessica Dang: Oh, yeah. That's a good shortcut that people should have.

Laura Fuentes: Yes.

Jessica Dang: Great. I think that some people think, "Oh, since you're a food person, you do everything from scratch." It's like, "No, no, no." The reason we are able to execute homemade dinners every night is because we understand what shortcuts we need.

Laura Fuentes: Totally, like rotisserie chickens. But anyway, move on.

Jessica Dang: Yeah. Guilty pleasure, food or not.

Laura Fuentes: Food, butter. Life, blow outs. I go to my hair salon once a week.

Jessica Dang: Good. I wanted to clarify you're talking about hair blowouts. Because I have a baby right now and I'm like, "Oh, blowouts? What?"

Laura Fuentes: Not that type of blowout, although I can totally tackle, like a champ. I've been there.

Jessica Dang: Oh, yes. I'm hoping to get out of that stage in not too long. Your favorite life optimization or organization app?

Laura Fuentes: Shared calendars is a big deal because it's part of communicating. So we have a kids' cal. We have a master calendar. But then we have kids activity calendars, which we share with my in-law. I don't subscribe to any service for that. It's just like my iCal. But like my in-laws, I share my kids' activities and calendars with my parents, my husband. I'm all about understanding and taking control of my time. And that involves communicating what's happening with other people in our life. So shared calendars and Wunderlist. It's a shared to do list. That's an app.

Jessica Dang: Yes. I use Wunderlist. I love it. I have every list from grocery lists to meal plan ideas on Wunderlist. It's great.

Laura Fuentes: All Wunderlist.

Jessica Dang: Hardest thing you've done?

Laura Fuentes: The hardest thing I've done, I mean, there's a lot but I think the root of my personality may come from coming to the United States in my teens from Spain without speaking English. I think that has to be the hardest thing I've ever done.

Jessica Dang: Oh, yeah, of course. But you've done such a great job. I mean, you've done so much with your life.

Laura Fuentes: Thanks. It's just, honestly, I had a different answer for that for you. But the thing is, is that I have to think back of what makes me "me" is that mentality of, "I'm going to try it and see what happens." And it all stems from basically coming to a new country without speaking the language, and just having to figure it out. And I have taken that experience through everything else that I do. I don't always succeed at things, but that really shaped who I am today.

Jessica Dang: It is. I think that's why so many immigrants are entrepreneurs, because it takes a lot of that same mentality.

Laura Fuentes: Yeah, exactly.

Jessica Dang: Proudest thing you've done?

Laura Fuentes: Proudest thing. Okay. I know that you're going to relate to this. I don't know if it may be your proudest moment, but you have this similar experience. In 2014, I auditioned and I competed on Food Network.

Jessica Dang: Oh, what show?

Laura Fuentes: It was called Rewrapped, and it was with Mark Summers. It was a competition show. And I think it had a few seasons. But the point was, is that I'd never been in front of a camera in my life. I was still a mom. I had just taught myself how to cook like three years earlier. And I was really casted as the mom who cooks against two chefs. And A, I won. And B, I learned that I could just be myself and cook. I won with like a breakfast type of dish, and they were making all these intricate things. And I was like, "You know what? It's totally okay to be myself." On camera, on food network, or in life in general. So I was really proud. Because since then I learned that I could do it, so then I started doing videos, and then I made a bigger impact on people's lives because I put on my big girl panties and went and did it, you know?

Jessica Dang: Well, you're so good on camera, honestly. So I can't believe you just started a couple of years ago, and the Food Network was your first time.

Laura Fuentes: Not if you watched me on Food Network. I wasn't great, I'm telling you, because I was scared.

- Jessica Dang: Can we find this episode? I want to watch it. I've never heard of this show, actually.
- Laura Fuentes: I think, I'll send you the link. I definitely have it on Dropbox. I don't know if it's available out there. It might be. But I do have a blog post on it. It's like a Monte Cristo. I made waffles, okay? Because you know what? I'm a mom. I can make breakfast meals like a champ. And I knew that I could execute under pressure perfect waffles. So it was a Waffle Cristo. It's like a Waffle Monte Cristo.
- Jessica Dang: Oh, I have to find that. Well, anyways, yeah. Know your strengths. So breakfast for dinner is great. And breakfast on a reality TV competition show, also great, it turns out.
- Laura Fuentes: Yeah, see. It's all about experience.
- Jessica Dang: Yes, so okay, last book you loved.
- Laura Fuentes: I just reread, just in the last couple of months, which took me a long time to re-read, Les Misérables. It was the first book I read that was a really thick book back when I was learning English. So you have to get a little perspective. It was like 1200 pages. And I was so proud of myself that I got through an entire book in English, right? And I loved it for years. And I just read it recently as an adult. And I was like, "Oh, I really loved this book." And so that would be one of them. And then another book that I really liked recently was The Giver. It's a book about approach life with a giving mentality. You know, a lot of things happen for you. So, anyway, yeah.
- Jessica Dang: Yes, I love that book. The Giver. Lois Lowry. Everyone should check that out. It's a great kids book. Last TV show you loved.
- Laura Fuentes: Oh my gosh. I'm a serial watcher, so I watch a few at the same time. I really like the OA on Netflix. The Handmaid's Tale. 30 minutes, like comedies, like Younger. I think that's on ... I don't know what channel that is. But it's about a 40 year old woman who goes back into the workforce, and she pretends to be younger to get a job. And I think I really related with that show because I'm 40, and I, in the media and all the things that I do, I'm often surrounded by a lot of younger people. And so I kind of feel like what would it be like if I had to go back to the real work force and now I'm in my 40s? Right? So that was kind of a quick easy show, called Younger.
- Jessica Dang: Well, lady, you are, even though you said you are in your 40s, I feel like you're just getting started. There is so much ahead of you, and I had such a good time talking to you, and you have such wisdom, and I so appreciate you sharing that with me and us. So before we sign off, can you tell everyone one more time where they can continue to follow you on all your adventures and get even more of your practical real life tips on motherhood, as well as packing lunches?

Laura Fuentes: So if you like to watch video, YouTube is the place to go for cooking videos and such. YouTube/Momables. You and I were talking about how we manage our social media. I run my social channels on Instagram. If you want to get to me, that's the place to go @LauraSFuentes is my personal, and @Momables. You'll get all the food ones there. Yeah, so LauraFuentez.com or Momables.com for a lot of the things that we talked about today, from Picky Eating to Whole30 top family programs. They're all there.

Jessica Dang: All right. Thank you so much, Laura. Everyone, go follow Laura on Instagram and check out her website. Anything you have to ask about picky eating or lunches, I am sure she has answered. So check all the resources she has out.

Laura Fuentes: Thank you so much.

Jessica Dang: Such an incredible and wise woman, right? Even trimmed down, this episode was definitely a bit longer than our usual episode link because Laura had so many good just general life outlook tips to share. I know I'm definitely going to start respecting my kids' "no"s at the dinner table. And I really, really want to work on being less particular about how others in my household do chores. That's going to be a hard one for me. But I'm going to try to remember Laura's words: "At least it's done, and you didn't have to do it."

Jessica Dang: And speaking of letting other do things for you, make sure to check out Momables or Cook Smarts meal plans. With your busy schedule, meal planning is one of the easiest tasks to delegate to a company like ours or Laura's we seriously spend all day thinking of how to organize simple but creative dinners and a meal plan so that you save time, money, and food waste. Just head to CookSmarts.com and grab a free 30 day trial, and fill this school year with delicious memories around the dinner table, not stressful afternoons of, "What the heck am I going to make for dinner after picking Billy up from soccer practice?" Because nobody has time for that.

Jessica Dang: Before we wrap up, a huge shout out to Triscuit K because I love my Triscuits, and I love this review. "We all have to eat, and Jess and the Cook Smarts team have become my go-to friends for kitchen know-how. They never forget that many of us are functional kitchen users at best. Plenty of explanation for newbies and exploration for foodies. Staffed by busy folks with real lives and small to normal sized kitchens, who understand the need for efficiency. Plus, they are just nice people to have hanging around when the dishwasher or the dryer need emptying." Thank you, Triscuit K. We've got a colorful Cook Smarts tote bag for you. So email us at hello@cooksmarts.com to claim it.

Jessica Dang: And if you want to throw some stars our way, I'm not going to stop you. And if we share your review on a feature episode, you too will get a beautiful and functional Cook Smarts tote bag to take with you to the grocery store. So head to iTunes, leave us a review, and make sure to subscribe if you haven't yet. And of course, tell your friends. With that, thank you for letting us join you in your

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kitchen, or wherever you're listening to this podcast. And until next time, happy cooking, from your kitchen cheerleader.