

Hi there! You're listening to episode #10 of the In the Kitchen with 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.

We're doing something pretty different for today's episode. I've created a meal prep meditation to provide you with a little bit of kitchen motivation and to help you improve those prep skills.

So let's just go ahead and get zen.

Welcome to the kitchen. Welcome to time you get to spend working with your hands and creating something delicious. Your future self will thank you for taking the time today to get some meal prep done. By the end of this meditation, you may have a fully finished meal ready to be enjoyed. Or maybe you'll have all the components of a meal chopped, organized and ready to be cooked at a moment's notice. Wherever you end up, know that you did something good for both your mental and physical well being and you're just a few steps away from a nurturing meal that you made!

As we begin, let's pull out our prep tools -- your ingredients, your prep bowls, your cutting board, and of course, your knife, our most important tool in the kitchen. Now if you don't own designated prep bowls, don't let that stop you from creating an organized mise en place. Use Tupperware or your dinnerware to house your minced, diced, chopped, spiralized, and marinated ingredients. Really, any type of container will work.

Sometimes we get too caught up in needing the right tool for everything and letting that prevent us from just doing but the truth is the stuff isn't what helps you cook. What helps you cook is you -- your own motivation, determination, and willingness to set aside the time. Never forget -- you're the key to making it happen. You're the one with the power to decide what cooking means to you -- what it means for your health, what it means for your finances, what it means for your family.

Now before we begin our prep, feel free to pause this meditation and take some time to read through your recipe first. It's worth taking those few extra minutes to understand where the recipe is taking you and also to figure out how things need to be chopped and what ingredients can be combined together, like if the mushrooms and peppers are added at the same time, they can share the same prep container. Knowing what components you need to prepare and the plan for each one of them will make the cooking stage so much more calm and organized.

Once you're ready, let's get your cutting board set up. If you find that your cutting board often slips around while you're chopping, grab a kitchen towel, fold it in half and place it underneath the board. Like I said before, it's not about fancy tools -- a simple kitchen towel provides all the grip your cutting board needs for a safer chopping set up. You'll be able to speed through prep more efficiently when you have the most optimal setup.

If some of your ingredients require a rinse or a wash, pull out a colander or your salad spinner. I find that the salad spinner works for so much more than just salad greens. It's an all-in-one colander, mixing bowl, and drying tool. It's my preferred tool for washing and drying all produce and then I will often use the bowl as a mixing bowl to combine salad components with its dressing or tossing air-fried veggies with some oil and spices before they go into the airfryer.

One of the best things you can do for your future self in the kitchen is to minimize the number of bowls, pots, and pans you use. With any tool you use in the kitchen, think about how you can stretch its use for prep and cooking so you end the night with as few dishes to clean as possible. Can your saute pan also be used to boil pasta too? Can your prep bowls be used during the cooking process too?

Once your ingredients are washed and ready for chopping, grab your trusty knife. How does it feel in your hand? How do you feel holding your knife? Nervous or confident? Our knife should feel like our most useful tool in the kitchen but often it's not. Most of us weren't taught the basics of how to use it efficiently or safely. Let's change that today so that every time you pick up your knife, you feel like you could conquer any chopping task ahead of you with ease and confidence.

The first step to that is having a sharp knife. Could your knife's blade use a little bit of love? Whether your knife cost \$10 or \$200, every knife needs some regular tender loving care to keep it at its sharpest. If you've never taken it to a professional sharpener, consider looking one up near you. If you own a honing steel, that's a great tool for routine at-home care. If you have one, let's go ahead and use it now. Hold your knife in your dominant hand and press the back of the blade against the steel so it forms like a really wide V. Now position the blade so that it's at a 30 degree angle to your steel. Now draw the blade across the steel until you hit the tip. Do this about 4 to 6 times on each side to help push the teeth of your knife's blade back together. If you're having any trouble understanding these directions, don't worry -- a quick YouTube video search will provide some great visual guidance.

Now make sure you're holding your knife with a good firm grip right where the blade and the handle meet. Wrap your hand around that part like you're shaking someone's hand. If you position your hand too far back or rest your index finger on top of the blade, you'll end up with a wobbly knife stroke. With the right grip, you'll be able to easily follow the contours of your knife's blade with each stroke forward, guiding it back and forth, back and forth, back and forth through whatever you might be chopping -- whether it's a tender stalk of celery or a hard-rooted carrot. With a sharp knife and a safe grip, your knife will do the hard work for you.

Another way to speed up prep is to make sure your ingredient isn't rolling all over your cutting board. Unfortunately most vegetables aren't shaped like cubes and their contours can make chopping a bit precarious. Instead of fighting the shape of a vegetable, let's reshape it so that we can more safely and more quickly get it to the shape we desire. Take a look at whatever you're chopping and see how you can use your first cut to create a stable, flat surface. Now you

can rest the ingredient on this flat surface for subsequent cuts. Slice off the non-root end of an onion. Split a sweet potato in half widthwise. Slice off the bottom of a butternut squash. All these cuts create a flat surface for easier chopping to follow.

As you're slicing, also remember to keep the fingers of your other hand tucked under so that they're nice and protected. Move them back with every slice and use your knuckles to provide a physical guide for your knife. This positioning might not come naturally at first, but with everything in life, it's about your willingness to practice and put in the time. You're already putting in the time to prep and cook -- it will just take a little bit more attention and focus to see and make progress during this time. Your time is valuable and precious, so let's always make the best use of it.

When you finish with each ingredient, move it to its designated prep bowl to keep your cutting board uncluttered and your prep zone organized. The kitchen workspace you create ends up reflected in our energy and emotions. When your space is tidy and organized, there's less room for chaos to seep into our cooking process and our mood. The stress that sometimes surrounds us as we rush to prepare a meal is harder to conjure up when our environment doesn't allow for it.

Though we're nearing the end of our meditation, I want you to continue at your own pace until all your prep work is done. Perhaps you switch over to listening to your favorite podcast, a playlist of motivational music, or even catching up on a show that makes you happy. This is your time. When we stop feeling that the time we spend prepping and cooking as a chore and instead as a time to relax and recharge, the work speeds by. Maybe it doesn't even feel like work at all but an opportunity to use our hands and connect with nature's offerings.

Before we say goodbye today, please take a moment to look at the work you've done and take pride in the accomplishment you've made over these last few minutes. Thank you for taking the time today to invest in your future self. Thank you for allowing me into your kitchen. I know that getting started is always the hardest part, so if you ever need some motivation, you can always return to this meditation to get you going in the kitchen. I hope this meditation provides you with the peace and guidance we sometimes need in the kitchen. Until next time, happy cooking.

So that was a bit different, right? But I had a lot of fun thinking about what I would want to say to you if I could be in your kitchen with you every day. I know how busy and hectic getting a meal on the table could be, and like I said in the meditation, I hope it provided you with the peace and guidance we sometimes need in the kitchen. If you enjoyed it and think I should make another meditation down the road, let us know in today's show notes, which you can find by going to [cooksmarts.com/podcast/10](https://cooksmarts.com/podcast/10) or just message me on Instagram at [@jessdangcs](https://www.instagram.com/jessdangcs) or [@cooksmarts](https://www.instagram.com/cooksmarts).

I've had an incredible time making these first 10 episodes, and I want to continue bringing you content that you want to hear so drop me a line at any of those places with questions and suggestions.

We're gonna take a short summer break because well, it's summer and also because I need some time to get my brain back into shape after having my 3rd baby a few months ago. Don't worry though, we'll be back in a few weeks with new episodes because I've got tons more to share with you.

To support this podcast, please make sure you're subscribed and take a moment to leave us some stars on iTunes or tell a friend about it. It really makes such a huge difference, so do it!

Lastly, if you're not a member of our award winning meal plan service yet, sign up at [cooksmarts.com](http://cooksmarts.com). We have so many delicious meals for you to use this meditation to, so let's get cooking and finding more zen in the kitchen together.

Thank you for letting us join you in your kitchen or wherever you're listening to this podcast, and until next time, happy cooking from your kitchen cheerleader!