



## Introduction

Common wisdom says there's no way we can "have it all." This may well be true in most cases, but when it comes to the kitchen, there actually is a way to have it all: meals that taste good and leave us feeling warm and satisfied; food that is not only healthy but interesting, economical and easy to make; a kitchen where there is more comfort than chaos—maybe even some fun and creativity as we cook. As incredible as it may sound, all this is possible, or whatever else we want from the kitchen, whether it's implementing a special diet, cooking for a picky eater, making meals on an extremely tight time budget or just fixing decent lunches for our kids.

The secret to having it all is simple: **Take control of your kitchen!**

Most of us have probably experienced what it's like to be in an out-of-control kitchen. Basically, it's a lot like being on a treadmill. Every mealtime we struggle over what to make, searching the cupboards, and even running to the store for inspiration. Eventually, after scrapping and scurrying, we manage to piece something together. It may not be that nutritious, it may not taste that great, it may have taken until 8:00 at night, and it may be the same thing we had two nights ago—but we survived another meal. The only problem is that we have to start all over again the next day!

The good news is that we can pull the plug on this treadmill at any time, just by taking control in the kitchen. Taking control is how you become the driver in your kitchen, with the ability to steer where you want and get what you want. By taking control, you transform your kitchen from dysfunctional to functional, from a place where it is tiresome, difficult and time-consuming to make meals to a place where it is entirely manageable—and even easy and fun—to make the meals of your dreams.

# Take Control of Your Kitchen!

## THE KITCHENSMART STRATEGIES

In a nutshell, the way to take control in the kitchen is by simplifying and organizing how we cook and how we arrange our kitchens. Eliminating cupboard clutter, having a system for coming up with good meal ideas, being "listsmart" at the grocery store, and having the right equipment essentials are just a few of the "KitchenSmart" strategies that help us gain control in the kitchen.

There are many more KitchenSmart strategies, but basically they can be grouped into five categories that correspond to the five main areas of meal-making:

- finding recipes and meal ideas,
- making meal decisions,
- shopping for food,
- equipping the kitchen, and
- keeping a pantry.

Within each of these five areas, there are plenty of ways to eliminate stress and friction so things go more smoothly in the kitchen. Take the first step of finding **meal ideas**, which should be fairly easy. Most of us have several cookbooks, a recipe box filled with meal options, and maybe even a heap of newspaper and magazine clippings stashed away in some corner. Yet even with all these resources, there's still a good chance we can't figure out what to fix for dinner each night! In this book you'll learn how to put the ideas in your recipe collection to good use by creating a meal idea list, de-cluttering your collection, and cleaning up and categorizing what's left.

Getting into the planning habit is the way to make the second **meal decision** step easier and more efficient. We've all experienced the aggravation of walking into the kitchen not knowing what to fix—and then not having the right ingredients for whatever we finally do decide to make. In this book, you'll learn how to avoid the agony and pitfalls of last minute meal decisions by planning ahead, first for a couple days at a time and then for longer periods if desired. You'll also discover a few jumpstarting tricks, some side dish strategies, and a number of tips for building good nutrition and convenience into your meal plans.

The humble shopping list is the key to control when it comes to the **grocery shopping** step. After making a meal plan, simply skim through it and jot down what you need at the store. Then you'll be sure to have the right ingredients on hand for the meals you want to make. No more time wasted going back to the store for missing ingredients, and no more wasted minutes spent wandering the aisles, wondering what to get. Categorizing your list, using a refrigerator list and learning how to be "marketing-wise"

at the grocery store are some of the other KitchenSmart tips and tricks you'll learn in this area.

The fourth piece of the kitchen control puzzle is having the right **kitchen equipment**. Interestingly, we can as easily suffer from having too much as too little when it comes to equipment. For this reason, the KitchenSmart strategies in this area are designed to help you acquire the right tools and equipment but not so much that you get overcome by cupboard clutter. You'll also learn how to organize your drawers and cupboards so it's easy to find the tools you need, when you need them.

A **well-stocked pantry** eliminates a host of cooking and shopping headaches, which is why the final set of KitchenSmart strategies focuses on this area. You'll learn about setting up a pantry (if you don't already have one); taking the temptation out of, and building good nutrition into your pantry; and arranging your staples so they can be found quickly and pulled out with ease when the mealtime rush is on.

So there you have it: Adopt the simple KitchenSmart strategies in these five main areas and kitchen control will be yours—along with everything else you want from the kitchen, be it wholesome food, fast and easy meal making or simple comfort and connectedness.

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

From the descriptions above, you might have noticed something unusual about the KitchenSmart strategies. You might have noticed that even though they all have to do with cooking, *they all take place before you ever begin cooking!* The reason for this is simple: because there's more to cooking than just cooking.

Most of us have the understandable but nevertheless mistaken impression that meal making doesn't begin until you walk in the kitchen and start chopping, mixing and frying. In truth, however, if you really want to be quick and successful at making meals, several things must be done and in place before you ever set pan to burner. Have you figured out what to make, for example? Do you have the recipes that are needed? How about the ingredients called for? Can you quickly find all the equipment and ingredients you need? Do you even have the right equipment and pantry staples to begin with?

You may not realize it, but taking care of these pre-cooking issues is the key to success in the kitchen. By transforming your kitchen into a friendly and supportive cooking environment, you "set the stage for success" and ensure that your meal making efforts are efficient and bear good fruit.