

CURATED RECIPES: BREAKFAST AND BRUNCH

The ethos of this curated recipe document is self-care in the form of doing something as simple as putting together a delicious breakfast or brunch for yourself. These are recipes I use regularly, edited countless times, all with vegan substitutions to boot. Straight from my messy scribbles and iPhone notes to here, for you. Whatever recipe you try, I want the key takeaway to be this: ***Eat slowly, and mindfully.*** Chew your food, feel every bite. Drink something between bites. Eating slowly and mindfully is the most underrated, rare thing. Doing so allows for clear satiety signalling between your gut and brain, and of course, you get to properly enjoy your food. Mindful eating has been a lifesaver for me. It allows room for both health-conscious choices and slightly more indulgent ones, because you will know when you are satisfied. I elaborate more on mindful eating in my wellness guide, so check that out separately. Even if you live with someone else or a few others, choose at least one meal a day to eat mindfully. Breakfast is usually the easiest because not everyone wakes up at the same time, and you have some quiet time and space for yourself.

The recipes are designed to have specific drink and music pairings which are conducive to the mindful eating experience. For reliability's sake, I kept to metric instead of cup measurements. Some of the tunes are trance-like and slow for full immersion into the breakfast experience, so you don't have to feel like you have to rush through the bites and get on the bus. Play the songs on repeat until you are done with your meal. I usually put on more upbeat music when I cook (Wake me up before you go-go, hello), then slower tunes for eating afterwards. There is no such thing as 'I don't have enough time' if you can sit through 5 minutes of music. Of course, choose whatever music you like.

NOTE: in every recipe there's an asterisk*, which will indicate the vegan substitution

***= vegan substitution**

My own mornings usually move along as shown below. It's no perfect formula, but the elements of mindfulness, nourishment and movement allow for better homing in on the day's purpose, whatever that may be. Make your morning your own.

Step 1: Rise, water, make coffee

Step 2: Mindful hour of yoga or pilates, and journalling

Step 3: Shower and get ready

Step 4: Finish some work or the most important task of the day

Step 5: A mindful breakfast, of which the perfect components are: food, music, no technology. Most importantly, there must be coffee.

Here we go.

BANANA OAT PANCAKES (serves 3-4)

Made these for my boyfriend and his flatmates a number of times during the quarantine period and they were a hit. They are more what you think of as 'typical' pancakes, not too thick and fluffy but definitely not thin and sad. The oats add a nice chew and texture, while filling you up for the whole morning. Try and use ripe bananas here.

Drink: Oat milk latte

Tune: Morning has Broken by Cat Stevens

Ingredients

30g butter, melted, plus a tablespoon more for cooking in the pan (*same amount of vegan butter)

1 banana

60g quick cooking oats

1 egg (*2 vegan eggs made by mixing 2 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 5 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

140g plain flour (I used half wholewheat flour here, but use whatever flour you prefer, with the exception of coconut flour, which absorbs too much liquid)

½ tsp salt

2 heaped tsp of baking powder

250ml milk of choice

To top: 2 large bananas or three small ones, cut at a slight angle into coins

Toppings: coconut yoghurt, chia seeds, maple syrup

Directions

In a large bowl, mash the banana with a fork. Add the egg, milk and salt and use the fork to briefly whisk everything together. In a separate, smaller bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder and oats with a spoon. Tip the dry mix into the wet ingredients, add the melted butter, and use the spoon to fold the dry ingredients into the wet, until no more lumps are seen, and you get a smooth pancake batter that easily drops off your spoon with a flick of your wrist. Put a pan on your stove and preheat your stove to medium heat.

Add a pat of butter to the pan, and once it has melted, add tablespoonfuls of batter to the pan. Let the underside cook for 2 minutes before flipping and cooking for another minute. The first pancakes are always slightly weird looking, but as the pan continues to heat up, you should get a nice even browning on both sides of each pancake. Layer the cooked pancakes between paper towels so that they don't stick to each other or place them in a warm oven (around 100C) if you are not serving them immediately, but don't keep them in there too long or they will lose moisture. When done with the pancakes, add more butter to the pan and toss in your sliced bananas. Let the banana cook for a couple of minutes, add a sprinkle of cane or demerara sugar on the tops of the banana coins, then flip them and cook the undersides for another minute or so, until they get soft. Serve the pancakes with thick coconut yoghurt, the cooked banana, a sprinkle of chia seeds and maple syrup.

Note: you can use whole rolled oats, but you may need slightly less milk for a less liquidy batter at the end.

BANANA HOT CAKE (serves 1-2)

This is one of my personal favourites to enjoy occasionally, and is perfect to share with your special someone, or just enjoy it all alone— eat some and the rest will freeze beautifully. Absurdly fluffy on the inside, these are a fun one for a brunch get-together with friends, so get ready to impress. Since there is no butter or egg in this recipe, the cream is necessary for the fluffy and juicy insides, but you can also substitute this with buttermilk or vegan buttermilk if you have that lying around instead.

Drink: Black coffee

Tune: Je te laisserai des mots by Patrick Watson

Ingredients

1 banana

150ml single cream (*same amount of vegan cream)

130g plain flour (use wholewheat here if you prefer)

1 heaped teaspoon baking powder

¼ tsp salt

20g sugar (any will do, but I used raw cane sugar)

120ml milk of choice

Topping: fresh berries, maple syrup, coconut yoghurt

Directions

You would need a standard 8-inch heavy-duty pan, either non-stick or cast iron here. In a large bowl, mash the banana, then add the cream, milk, flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Whisk everything together. Place a pan on the stove and preheat the pan to medium heat. Add a generous pat of butter to the pan. I say generous (at least a tablespoon) here because you want to be able to easily flip the hot cake afterwards. Once the butter melts, add all the batter to the pan. Wait for bubbles to appear on the whole surface of the pancake, which will take around 3 minutes on medium heat. Once you see the bubbles and you can easily run your pancake spatula around the edges, be brave and flip the pancake to cook the other side. This side will take a little shorter, around 2 minutes. Place the cooked pancake on a large plate and serve with the berries, maple syrup and yoghurt.

15-MIN FRENCH TOAST BAKE (serves 4-5)

French toast, in any and all of its forms, will always remain my favourite breakfast to date. I still make this at least once a month and haven't skipped this tradition in *years*. So, before I spend 2 more pages waxing lyrical about the spiritual wonder of eggy bread, I'll get on with the actual formula. I know that the vegan egg substitution here is missing my usual chia seed substitution too, but I avoided it here because even after gelling up, you get a different consistency after baking them into the bread and custard, so the texture is not as even. Go ahead and use chia seeds if that's all you have, but ground flaxseed would still be preferred.

Drink: Oat milk latte

Tune: Death with Dignity by Sufjan Stevens

Ingredients

3-4 large, torn-up slices of brioche (around 2.5 cups) of cubes bread of choice such as sliced white, or challah

3 eggs (*5 vegan eggs made by mixing 5 tbsp ground flaxseed with 10 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

360ml milk of choice (oat/whole/almond)

½ tsp salt

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp vanilla extract

3 tbsp light brown sugar

2 tbsp coarse sugar (such as demerara) for sprinkling

80ml maple syrup (anything but Aunt Jemima's)

Directions

Preheat your oven to 220C (no fan). Grease an 8x8-inch or 9x9-inch square baking dish with cooking spray or a pat of butter. Try and get all the corners here. Pour the maple syrup into the pan and move it around to spread it all over the bottom. For the custardy batter, in a medium bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, sugar, salt, vanilla and ground cinnamon.

Place the torn bits of bread into the baking pan and then pour the eggy batter on top. Make sure the surfaces are in contact with the custard. Sprinkle the two tablespoons of coarse sugar evenly on top. Place the dish in the preheated oven and bake for 15 minutes. Check if the top is golden and crisp. If not, bake for 2 minutes longer. When you take it out, the insides should be very moist and still a little wobbly when you shake it, but not wet. Serve hot with cold cream, maple syrup and berries. Or serve as a dessert with the best vanilla ice cream you have (you know, the one with the real specks of vanilla in it).

PEANUT BUTTER BREAKFAST BARS (makes 6-9 servings depending on how big you cut them)

I made this a lot in my first year of graduate school as they are portable, filling and delicious. Just typing this recipe out makes me feel nostalgic, as it has seen me through all weathers. Not too sweet, a slight fudgy texture in the middle, and mildly crisp edges. A winner.

Drink: Oat milk with a shot of espresso

Tune: Blackbird by The Beatles

Ingredients

1 banana

60ml coconut oil or melted butter (*same amount of vegan butter)

100g peanut butter (I prefer chunky but use smooth if that's what you prefer)

100g cane sugar (any other type of sugar also works, but avoid dark brown sugar or overly treacly sugars)

1/2 tsp salt

1 egg (*2 vegan eggs made by mixing 2 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 5 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

60g wholewheat flour (use plain white flour here if you want)

60g whole rolled oats

Directions

Preheat your oven to 180C and line an 8x8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper. Cut the paper so that one edge is 8 inches, and the length is longer, so that you get a slight overhang when you place it into the pan. In a small bowl, microwave the peanut butter for at least 15 seconds or until it is warm and runny. In a large bowl, mash the banana. Then add the coconut oil or melted butter, warm peanut butter, egg or vegan egg, salt, sugar, flour and oats. Mix everything together with a spoon or rubber spatula. Pour batter into the prepared pan and bake in the preheated oven for 25 minutes. Wait 10 minutes before slicing and serving. I like eating this with crushed almonds and more banana or sliced on top, but to be honest, these are perfect all on their own.

Note: You can use either all flour or all oats, but instant oats will work better if you choose to use only oats.

RICE CAKE GRANOLA (makes 12 servings)

Fun, easy, treacly, wacky. I had no idea what exactly I was doing when I first attempted this a couple of years ago, but I liked it so much that I made it many times more in the years following. You get these beautiful, large chunks of crispy granola, and depending on how large your baking tray is, some of the larger chunks may have nice squishy insides.

Drink: Iced cappuccino

Tune: Here Comes the Sun by The Beatles

Ingredients

80g unsalted butter (*same amount of vegan butter)

120g blackstrap molasses (or dark honey, but the former yields a chunkier granola)

90g light brown sugar

1 tsp ground cinnamon

100g chocolate-covered rice cakes, chopped into thick chunks (or use 70g plain rice cakes and mix in 30g or a large handful of chopped dark chocolate)

80g oats or muesli

15g nuts of choice, chopped coarsely

100g dried fruit (if you're not a fan, substitute this with more chopped nuts instead, or 100g of extra muesli/oats)

Directions

Preheat your oven to 190C and line a large baking tray with parchment paper. Combine the butter, molasses and sugar in a saucepan. Bring everything to medium-high heat and stir the melting mixture together with a wooden spoon. Then bring everything to a boil. Once it comes to a boil, take it off the heat, then pour in all the rest of the ingredients—oats/muesli, cinnamon, rice cakes, dried fruit and nuts.

Transfer to the prepared baking pan and use the bottom of a spoon or a rubber spatula to flatten and smooth everything out a little so it will cook evenly in the oven. Bake for 10-12 minutes, then take the pan out and let the batter cool for another 10 minutes. You will notice a little molasses leakage at the side, but not to worry for this is expected. Leaving the pan to cool will let everything rest and harden up. Use a spoon to break everything up a little after the granola has cooled, but don't overdo it! You want large chunks to remain. Store in an airtight container for 1.5 weeks. Enjoy in a bowl with cold milk, topped with fresh or frozen fruit.

PILLOW PANCAKES 2.0

Most of you would know my classic pillow pancakes, which have been my top recipe since the dawn of its release. They freeze wonderfully and you can even make the batter the night before— when you want to make them, let them warm up at room temperature for 5-10 minutes before cooking. They are ridiculously fluffy, with crisp edges and soft insides. Although vegan substitutions are provided, I found that using normal egg and flour will result in a fluffier pancake. This is one of the more indulgent recipes on this list, so go all out with the chocolate and toppings. These are perfect for sharing with family and friends. Back in Singapore I made these for my sisters almost every Sunday. The tradition remains strong whether or not I am alone; I simply freeze the rest of the batch and eat on the rest of the Sundays that same month. To be honest, they tend to be gone before then...

Drink: Black coffee topped with a dash of cinnamon

Tune: Guitar Man by Bread

Ingredients

130g plain flour

6g (1 tbsp) baking powder

1g baking soda

½ tsp salt

20g sugar

100ml milk of choice

60ml yoghurt

30g butter

1 egg (*2 vegan eggs made by mixing 2 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 5 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

Additional butter for cooking

Optional: large handful or about 50g dark chocolate chunks or chocolate chips

Directions

Melt the butter in the microwave in 20 second increments on high power until completely melted. Leave to cool for 5 minutes before using. Mix the milk and yoghurt together in a large bowl and leave to curdle for 5 minutes to get something that resembles buttermilk. Of course, if you already have buttermilk then just use 160ml of that instead. In a separate medium bowl, briefly whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, optional chocolate chips and salt with a fork. Whisk the egg or vegan egg into the milk-yoghurt mixture. Add the dry mixture to the wet mixture and use a spatula to mix everything together until just combined. You should get a thick consistency that still drops off the spatula easily. Let the pancake batter rest in the fridge for 10 minutes before using. Refer to above if you made the batter the night before.

Place a pan on the stove, add a pat of butter and turn the heat on to medium. Once the butter is melted and sizzling, use a ladle to scoop of batter and place dollops of batter onto the pan. Each pancake should be at least 3 inches wide. Cook for 2 minutes, then use a spatula to quickly check if the undersides have browned. Like all my other pancake recipes, the first pancake or first batch will look a little odd so don't worry if they don't have that classic browned and mottled effect. Flip once the undersides are cooked and cook the other sides for another couple minutes before removing. Layer the cooked pancakes between paper towels so that they don't stick to each other or place in a warm oven (around 100C) if you are not serving them immediately, but don't keep them in there for too long or else they lose their moisture. Serve with more butter, berries and maple syrup.

MINI BATCH BREAKFAST CHOCOLATE CHIP MUFFINS

Right, these are some extremely fluffy muffins. I know the words breakfast and chocolate chip shouldn't go together, but dark chocolate and the oats in this recipe make it feel relatively breakfast-appropriate. You can actually substitute the sugar with the same amount or about a quarter-cup of honey if you want the natural and earthy consistency of a natural sweetener instead of sugar. The size of this batch is quite small but perfect if you're making this for a few friends in the morning. You should get around 6 medium muffins. Of course, you can scale up the amount and freeze the rest in the freezer.

Drink: Mocha

Tune: Honey pie by Johnny Utah

Ingredients (makes about 6 muffins)

60g plain flour

70g instant or whole rolled oats

60g raw cane sugar (or any sweetener you like)

5g baking powder

60ml milk of your choice (I usually use oat)

50g plain yoghurt (*plant milk yoghurt such as soy, almond or oat)

75g butter (*same amount of vegan butter)

1 egg (*2 vegan eggs made by mixing 2 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 5 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

70g chopped dark chocolate

Optional: coarse sugar (demerara sugar, the sort you might put in your coffee) for sprinkling

Directions

Melt the butter by placing it in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave until everything is melted, which will take a minute if the butter is just out of the fridge, in 20-30 second increments. Leave the melted butter to cool for a couple of minutes before using. Preheat the oven to 200C and line a muffin tin with 6 liners. Mix together the flour, sugar and chocolate in a medium bowl. If using honey, leave out the sugar here first. Mix together the wet ingredients (milk, yogurt, egg or vegan egg, and the cooled melted butter).

Tip the dry ingredients into the wet and fold until everything is just combined. Pour the batter into the lined muffin tin. Sprinkle on coarse sugar. Bake for 15 minutes exactly in the preheated oven. A wooden skewer inserted into the middle should come out with moist crumbs. If it is still visibly too wet, leave the muffins to cook further for 2 minutes.

If freezing the muffins, microwave them for a minute on high straight from the freezer before enjoying.

TAHINI CINNAMON BLONDIES

A personal favourite. These blondies saw me through graduation, heartbreak, academic stress, all of it. Wow. I also made them twice a week and sold them for my catering service, but I altered them slightly here to better accommodate both vegans and gluten-free's. The tahini (sesame paste) transfers sophistication and density to the bars, marrying beautifully with the cinnamon. I prefer light to dark tahini here since its smooth runniness makes it easy to work with. Get the tahini from your local Arab store or online.

Drink: Cinnamon almond milk (heat up some almond milk in a microwave for a minute, then add a drizzle of honey and sprinkle of ground cinnamon on top)

Tune: Sunrise by Norah Jones

Ingredients (serves 8-10 depending on how big your bars are)

110g butter (*same amount of vegan butter)

60g white sugar

90g light brown sugar

1 egg (*3 vegan eggs made by mixing 3 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 6 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

75 light tahini

1 tsp ground cinnamon

½ tsp salt

95g plain flour (or substitute with wholewheat flour or 80g almond flour to make it gluten-free)

60g (a large handful) of chopped dark chocolate

Directions

Preheat your oven to 163C. Line an 8x8-inch or 9x9-inch baking pan with parchment paper. Alternatively, you can do this in a loaf pan, you would just need to bake this for 10 minutes longer. Melt the butter in a microwave-safe bowl in 30 second increments until all melted. Leave it to cool for 5 minutes before using. In a large bowl, mix together the melted butter, salt and sugars using a whisk. Then mix in the egg or vegan egg and tahini. Finally, add the flour (or almond flour) and chopped dark chocolate. Mix using a spatula until everything is well-combined and then pour the batter into your pan., Place the pan into the centre of your preheated oven and bake for 18-20 mins. When you take it out the top should look set but the middle still quite jiggly and almost undercooked. Don't worry, it's meant to be like that. The bars will set with time after you take them out. Leave them to cool for 10 minutes before slicing into bars and serving. Enjoy warm with milk or ice cream and extra cinnamon sprinkled on top, or simply alone!

VERSATILE OATS (classic, baked, overnight)

I used to make oats almost every day, especially during my climbing days, so I know a thing or two about what makes oats super creamy, filling and delicious. It's easy and convenient if you make this the night before too, if you want something without thinking the next morning. I found that it's all about technique and not so much about the brand of oats or milk you use. This recipe is extremely versatile because you can mix all the ingredients together the night before and then bake the whole thing for fresh baked oatmeal the morning after. The song, by the way, is perfect when you're at the stove stirring these oats. Love Billy Joel, by the way. This is simple, straightforward, and makes you feel like you know what you're doing with your life.

Drink: Black coffee topped with a dash of ground cinnamon

Tune: Piano Man by Billy Joel

Ingredients (serves 2 people)

90g oats

100g oat milk

500ml water

1 tbsp chia seeds (optional)

1 banana, mashed

1 sliced banana

½ tsp salt

Toppings: fresh fruit, honey

Directions

Put all the ingredients in a pot on the stovetop, bring to high heat, then bring heat to low when you see small bubbles. Let simmer for 15 minutes or until you get your desired thickness. Stir the chia seeds in nearer to the end of the cooking time. Optionally, stir in an egg white too for an even thicker and protein-filled meal. Top with sliced banana, chia seeds, nut butter and drizzle of honey. If baking the oatmeal to get oatmeal bars, simply mix all the ingredients together in a bowl the night before and put it in the fridge to set overnight. The next morning, take out the bowl and pour into a square 8x8-inch baking pan that's lined with parchment paper. Smooth out the top and bake at 180C for 25-30 minutes. When finished baking, leave to cool for 10 minutes, slice into bars and et voila, you have a portable snack or breakfast for the next few days.

CHEWY OATMEAL-RAISIN COOKIES

If you want chew, and oatmeal-raisin is your thing, this is it. I remember a heart-warming moment when I went to a friend's house and she made a batch of this and put it in the fridge, so she could control how much could be baked at a time for her and her flatmates. Just seeing how much they enjoyed it made this whole recipe-developing hobby feel so worth it. These cookies keep and also freeze for a while. Crisp all around the edges, chewy and gooey everywhere else.

Drink: Matcha latte (sounds weird but this works, especially if iced! Pour a cup of whatever milk you like into a microwave-safe bowl, then microwave on high for 1 minute. Then mix a tablespoon of matcha powder with a tablespoon of boiling water and whisk using a matcha whisk in a small bowl, then once everything is nice and homogenous, I add the hot milk and a tablespoon of honey or coconut sugar. Perfect!)

Tune: 59th St Bridge song by Simon and Garfunkel

Ingredients

1 egg (* 2 vegan eggs made by mixing 2 tbsp chia seeds or ground flaxseed with 5 tbsp water in a small bowl, and letting that gel for a couple of minutes before using in the recipe)

85 butter

30g white sugar

70g coconut or cane sugar

50g whole rolled oats

60g plain flour (or substitute with same amount of wholewheat flour if you prefer)

45g (a large handful) raisins

½ tsp baking powder

¼ tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

Directions

Start by browning the butter. Let the butter melt in a pan on medium heat, until you can see the butter start to go brown and it will emit a distinct nutty aroma. There will be a little bit of foam on top. Take off the heat and let the butter cook for 2 minutes before adding the sugar and egg or vegan egg. Add all the dry ingredients (oats, flour, salt and both leavening agents), then mix together with a spoon or rubber spatula until everything comes together nicely. The batter should be sticky and of a thick dropping consistency. Refrigerate the batter in the same bowl for at least an hour before baking. Preheat the oven to 180C before you want to bake the cookies. Line a baking tray with parchment paper. If you are making large cookies you will need 2 baking trays. Place heaped tablespoonfuls of batter at least 2 inches apart on the trays. Bake for 10 minutes, then take them out. The cookies should look relatively soft and slightly set around the edges. Leave them to cool for 10 minutes before eating warm. These also freeze beautifully or keep them at room temperature for up to 3 days.