

Hi there! You're listening to episode #21 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.

Happy new year! I know we've had a two month break and I have been busy beyond belief during the last two months with the holidays and gearing up for Cook Smarts' biggest month but it's so good to be back with you all through this podcast. Not only are we kicking off a new year together -- hello 2020! -- but we're kicking off a new decade together. This is a big deal and marks a big milestone in our friendship. We are gonna get stuff done this year, and I want to do everything I can to make it a successful year and decade for you in the kitchen and beyond.

So I just mentioned that January is Cook Smarts biggest month, and you probably can guess why. There are lots of people all over the world making their New Year's resolutions with the best of intentions. We all look to the new year as the time to make a fresh start, to get rid of old habits, develop good ones, but yet come February, or definitely by March, a lot of those hopes are already starting to fade. And since one of my goals in starting Cook Smarts was to help people not just develop this habit of home cooking but to actually make it an integral part of their life, I thought we would kick off the year talking about how to make your New Year's resolutions -- whatever they may be -- not just a temporary aspiration but true systemic life change.

And then we're gonna end the episode with some non-cooking related fun. I wanted to share some of my favorite things from 2019 because that's what friends do -- share stuff they love with one another. That is how our meal plan service has grown over the years -- because you have told your friends about it and they tell their friends. It's wonderful.

And speaking of our meal plan service. If you don't know what it's about, let me be a friend and tell ya why this year is the year you're going to lighten your mental load and not be stressed out by the question, "What's for dinner?" every single day. I want you to start off the year with both the mental and emotional capacity to tackle your New Year's resolutions and one of the best ways to do that is to free your mind of tedious tasks that you don't love to do that much any ways. If you're someone that gets frustrated with meal planning and are sick of cooking the same 10 meals over and over again, you will love our meal plan service.

For a very low monthly price, we will come up with your menu and grocery list every week. You take your list to the store, buy exactly what you need so you don't end up wasting food and money, and then bring it all home and follow our easy steps to dinner. We even have short fun videos integrated right into the steps so you'll become a more efficient cook as you're making dinner. So make 2020 the year you lighten your to-do list, reduce your food budget, and become a more confident cook -- I promise you can do all of that and so much more with Cook Smarts. If you've been wanting to improve your cooking routine, now is the time to get practicing! Head to cooksmarts.com and grab a free trial and let us lead you to success, happiness, and zen in the kitchen! You can use the code `DOLESSIN2020` at checkout to enjoy an additional 20% off.

Ok, now onto my steps for making every New Year's resolution stick. And even though we're talking New Year's resolution, you can use these steps any time you're trying to make a change or build a habit or a system. I know people put a lot of pressure on themselves during the new year, and I don't want you to do that. The only thing that's really changed is that we're writing 2020 instead of 2019 on our documents -- there is absolutely nothing special about January so if you want to start your changes outside of this month, that's totally fine. You can still listen to this episode and of course revisit it when you are ready.

In order to figure out how you will get to your goal, you need to take 1 very important step but it's one that people often skip when they're trying to make a change. Now if you have made a resolution this year, it's likely that this isn't the first time you've made that resolution. Many of us make the same resolution every year -- I'll start going to the gym, I'll spend less time on my phone, I'll pay off more credit card debt. It's kinda like Groundhog Day where we find ourselves in the same place again and again, repeating the same mistakes over and over again. So if this sounds like you, don't just repeat the cycle this year. Instead, start with a problem-solving approach and ask yourself, "Why wasn't I successful before?" or "What's standing between me and my goal?" That's actually the problem you need to solve for first.

So let's apply this to a very common New Year's resolution: I want to exercise more. I know plenty of people who say this every year but never get to where they want. But the issue is they're confusing their goals with the problem they need to solve for. Your goal is that you want to exercise more, but the problem isn't that you don't exercise enough. The problem is that you haven't figured out a way to incorporate exercise in your life in a way that will stick, so that's the "how" piece we need to figure out. I'm going to repeat that again because framing the problem correctly is the key not just to being successful with your New Year's resolutions but whatever problem you're trying to solve for in life. So, again if you haven't been able to fulfill your, "I want to exercise more" New Year's resolution year after year, the problem isn't that you don't exercise enough. The problem you need to solve for is **how** to incorporate exercise in your life in a way that will stick. Exercise is the goal. Figuring out **how** to get there is about making a plan to remove the problems standing between us and our goal.

This problem-solving approach actually came up for me recently when I was doing an interview for my friend Katie Kimball's online cooking course for kids called Kids Cook Real Food. She told me that she's always been on and off the meal planning wagon and asked me if I had any tips to stay on track, and I realized I couldn't offer her any tips without understanding why previous attempts didn't work. So that's what I asked her, "Why do you think you fall off the meal planning wagon?" And after we dug in a bit deeper, it became clear that Katie was too ambitious with her meal planning intentions. She was trying to introduce too many new recipes every week and she just needed to simplify. And I know she's not alone.

So many of us try to do complete 180's in the new year, and I just don't believe that that's the way true lasting habit change happens. One of my favorite self-help books is ["The Power of Habit" by Charles Duhigg](#), and in it he says that implementing habits require willpower but

willpower is a constrained resource. We don't have endless amounts of it so if we try to introduce too many habit changes or too extreme of a habit change from our current state, we will not have the willpower to sustain it.

So after you figure out the problem you're solving for and really understand why haven't previous attempts worked, the next thing you need to do is answer the question "How will I get there?" In order for you to be successful in meeting your goal, your plan has to address how you will remove the friction standing between you and your goal. So let's say your goal is that you want to cook more home-cooked meals but the problem you've experienced in past years is that you never know what to cook and didn't have enough variety. Your plan therefore needs to solve for that problem first. Once you remove that friction, you are much more likely to meet your goal.

The plan can have multiple stages to give us time to fully ramp up towards our final goal. I am all about keeping the bar low, especially in the beginning because I find it's better to trick your brain into success vs. feeling like you've failed early on. In the example I just shared, phase 1 of my plan would focus on removing the friction. Maybe you start by making a recipe binder and print out all the recipes that you already know and love so that you're excited to cook them and eat them. Our brains are wired to like rewards, and that's another thing Duhigg talks about in his book. We will do the things that make our brains feel happy so if you start off by cooking meals that you truly enjoy, then your brain will associate cooking with something that makes you happy. Maybe in phase 2, you join a meal plan service (I highly recommend this one called Cook Smarts) and add 1 or 2 new meals a week from it. You're still solving for your problem of not knowing what to cook but introducing changes and progress towards your goal in small steps.

Outside of addressing the problem or problems preventing you from achieving your goal, your plan should also incorporate 2 other important components. The first is rest. There is a reason why professional athletes have built in rest days to their training plans. In order for them to perform at their best, they need to rest. It's not deviating from their goals, it's part of the plan to get them to their goals. I love cooking but even I build in rest days. These might be days where we have leftovers or I make a shortcut meal or I plan for takeout from one of my favorite restaurants. They are built into my plan so it's not a last minute decision I feel guilty about making. You can also consider these rest days as rewards and maybe in the early phases of getting to your goal, you have to build them in more frequently and that is completely ok. Maybe for every 2 nights you cook, you build in 1 rest day. Do that for a few months and then stretch it to every 3 nights you cook, you build in 1 rest day. Rest is an important part of sustaining any longer term habit.

The second component is having a backup plan. And what I mean by this is everyone has weeks where we can't commit to our goals in the way we want, so instead of quitting and saying that's it, I'm just going to go back to my old habits, how do we set ourselves up to not fail in these circumstances. In the case of cooking, maybe you have a list of meals that aren't quite the

home-cooked meals you would aspire to make regularly but they're like good enough meals. I call these my homemade-ish meals. An example of a meal on this list could be hot dogs and frozen fries and those are the meals you pull out during those weeks when you know you are likely not able to perform at your best.

I know that getting more exercise is a very common resolution. I am someone who is very committed to exercising. My brain craves the endorphins, I have found a wide variety of exercise activities that I get a lot of enjoyment out of. I have set myself up for success in that way but there are days when I have a lot of meetings, I'm still pumping milk for Charlie, and I don't have a full 45 to 60 minutes to do something. So I have 2 workouts that I can do in 10 minutes -- one is just run a mile on the treadmill and the other is like a series of plyometrics like jump squats, burpees, that type of thing -- and doing of those 2 workouts is my backup plan. I don't have to think about it, and I also don't have to resign myself to not doing anything. Even though they are short, it still keeps the momentum of my intentions going.

And speaking of momentum, momentum is a crucial ingredient to successfully carrying out your New Year's resolutions. Otherwise, inertia takes over and we're nowhere farther from where we started. Again, I'm not encouraging you to make huge changes, I'm just encouraging you to get started. That is often the hardest part but you need to take that first small step to take all the steps that follow. Make a plan to guide you and to make it easier on you to get your goal but don't be a perfectionist about your plan or the goal. I so often think that we can be our own worst enemies. We are so often the ones standing in the way of our potential success. We want to wait for the perfect moment to start something, all the conditions have to be just so, but that perfect moment doesn't exist. It's also why your plan has to have a backup plan for when the conditions aren't perfect because they so often aren't.

When I was a cooking instructor, I remember meeting with a student who was a newish mom, and she didn't cook as much as she wanted to. And the reason she didn't was because she only wanted to cook if all the ingredients were organic so instead she often ordered prepared meals or ate out, which I doubt were made of all organic ingredients. But she was so attached to this notion that if she was going to make something for her child, it had to be perfect and perfect to her meant all organic. I wanted to tell her that she was never going to meet her goal if she was so strict about the execution but I didn't.

So if you're having trouble starting and afraid that you won't be perfect, I will link to a video that has given me so much inspiration to just start things over the years. As a business owner, I make goals and plans all year long. It's not just something I do only in January. We are constantly problem solving and figuring out why something didn't work. This video is aimed at creative types but I think it can apply to anyone who's a little bit apprehensive about starting anything. [In the video Ira Glass of This American Life](#) talks about how important it is to just start and then keep going even when you're full of doubts that it isn't your best work but that's the process. Everyone starts somewhere and the goal is to improve on where you started from.

And along that note, I was at a Zumba class the other day. It was a new substitute instructor, so I wasn't expecting much but the class was so good. As I was doing my kicks, jumps, and turns, I thought about how much time she put into practicing, into rehearsing before she could teach a class so well. It got me thinking that the first phases of our New Year's resolutions plans should be all about practicing. We need to practice in order to form that muscle memory so that the new things we're introducing in our lives -- whether they be cooking more, exercising more, or spending less -- don't feel so foreign. So I just want you to remember to grant yourself patience and grace as you're in the practice phase of whatever goals you might have for this year.

I've said this before in a different episode but goals mean nothing without a plan and then the effort required to execute the plan. If you ever get to the point where you feel like you just can't make it happen, I encourage you to think about the why. Why did you make this goal in the first place? Why is it important to you? Use that as your motivation to keep going. If the why isn't that important, then the goal clearly isn't that important to you, and you likely won't make it happen. I am someone who's still very analog despite all this technology around me. I like to write things down, and I encourage people to write their why down and make some sort of visual reminder of why this goal is important to them and worth the effort.

I committed to home cooking long ago when I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C at 17 but my reason for home cooking now as a 38 year old mom and entrepreneur is really my kids and the Cook Smarts community. Every day I jump into our Facebook Group and that is a visual reminder of why home cooking is important to me -- you all hold me accountable. Wanting to raise my kids to be independent adults who can cook a meal for themselves is the reason why I make sure we have home-cooked meals most nights.

So to sum it all up, to make sure you stick to your resolution, start off with just 1 goal. Make a plan for how you will get to your goal by removing all the friction and problems standing in your way. Include rest and backup into your plan. Don't be a perfectionist about it and just start and if you ever get discouraged, remember your why.

And that's it. If you follow these steps this year, your resolution won't stay a resolution. It'll just become a routine that's integrated into your life. I want to hear your goals for the year and support you, so please shoot me a text or leave a voice message at 650-386-0290 or message me on Instagram at @cooksmarts or @jessdangcs.

Now as I mentioned at the beginning of today's episode, I promised you a little recap of my 2019 because if I don't look back on it, I wouldn't believe it happened. 2019 was a crazy-ass year for me. I don't know how else to describe it. I had my 3rd kid in April. My other kids turned 2 and 4 this year. We had so many kid transitions from room sharing to potty training to new preschools, and they were all incredibly painful but like I said before, you just have to start and bear the pain in the beginning for the later payoff.

During all of this I launched this podcast, which I'm so proud of. It is so much fun to get to share all this information that's constantly churning in my head with you all. For this year, we are going to move from individual seasons to just being a year long podcast that publishes a new episode every 2 weeks so we can consistently be in your feed.

And of course, I continued to run Cook Smarts. Our annual meal planning session this year took place in October in California, and our team is just so amazing. I don't know how I got so lucky with Jackie, Jess, and Sarah. We also have a dozen other people supporting us, and with all of this help, I have big goals for Cook Smarts this year. I have really dug deep in the last few months to try to understand what hasn't been working and what I need to do to truly grow this service that I so believe in.

Even though I know I'm incredibly capable and competent woman, I also don't want to pretend to you all that this year was easy for me. It wasn't. There were so many moments where I just felt overwhelmed and in over my head. My brain literally feels like it's about to short circuit at any moment and I liken it to a computer CPU where all the applications are open and they're all like constantly running queries and the CPU just cannot process it all. I am sure any mom can relate. So to continue to function as a human being, I have needed to build in a lot of rest and recovery into my life and here are some of my favorite things from 2019 that have kept me sane and happy.

I started using a workout app called Aaptiv. It's all audio and there's great trainers and music that goes along with it, and I just love it. It was actually recommended by so many Cook Smarts members that we reached out to Aaptiv earlier this year to do a promotional partnership. I think you can still get it for 50% off using the URL aaptiv.com/cooksmarts. I mentioned that I love working out but I'm someone that needs to be told just what to do -- that is the friction I needed to remove. And though I usually go to workout classes, this year, my schedule is just all over the place so I needed something flexible as well.

Aaptiv was so instrumental in keeping me strong throughout my pregnancy and then regaining all that strength during my postpartum recovery. I was someone that would never use the elliptical but Aaptiv had a lot of elliptical workouts, and it was the perfect machine to use during pregnancy because it was low impact. Now that I'm mostly recovered from childbirth, I do a lot of their strength training, treadmill, yoga, and stretching workouts. The treadmill is not something I would normally do on my own but if someone is telling me to turn up the speed and incline and I can just follow along, I'm happy to do it. They even have meditations that we do with our kids to help them calm down during bedtime.

I think with the Cook Smarts 50% discount, I paid \$49.99 this first year, and it has been so worth it. Just like people love our meal plan service because they don't have to think about what to cook, I love Aaptiv because I don't have to think about what to do for a workout. The 2 super short workouts that are part of my backup plan are both from Aaptiv. It's probably the app I use most on my phone, and I know this sounds like a paid endorsement but it's totally not. I'm not an

affiliate, just a true fan. I've since looked at other workout apps, but haven't found something with so much variety and is also just audio. I prefer that because it loads so fast and you don't have to be looking at something during your workout.

Overall, one of the things that I'm proudest of is how exercise is just a part of my life. With 3 pregnancies in a very short amount of time, I'm just in awe of what a woman's body can handle and provide for, so I feel that I really need to take care of it with exercise. I'm stronger than I've ever been, and I think that sets up a really good example for my kids. Even outside of Aaptiv, I love going to Zumba and pilates classes, and I am always looking forward to working out. It has become a habit that I know is firmly imprinted into my brain and body.

Two other things I discovered this year that have also made me even more excited about working out are high-waisted leggings and a new brand of running shoe. I hadn't bought workout apparel basically for the last 4 years, except for some maternity stuff. My body was constantly changing from getting pregnant and so I refrained from buying anything during that time but now I am done getting pregnant. Charlie is definitely my last baby, so I decided to treat myself to all new workout clothes. My body has changed a lot especially in the middle region after 3 kids, and I just didn't feel super comfortable in my old workout stuff. In making the change, I have fully embraced high-waisted everything, especially workout tights. I know it sounds vain but sometimes vanity is our motivation, and that's perfectly ok.

And then the new running shoes that I have fallen in love with is a brand called On. They're light yet provide enough cushioning for all the treadmill running I've been doing. You can just slip them on and you don't have to tie them, which is a must for a mom who's always hurrying to get out of the door.

My other favorite service discovery is Nuuly, spelled N-U-U-L-Y. This is a clothing rental service by the company that owns Anthropologie so instead of buying really expensive Anthropologie clothes, you can rent 6 pieces a month for under \$100. And if you like anything, you can pay a discount to keep it. You get to try things you normally wouldn't want to necessarily own, and it's fun to get something new in the mail every month but not have to accumulate stuff in your closet, which I hate. So I'm gonna put [my referral link](#) in the show notes. If you subscribe through it, you get \$20 off your first month, and I also get \$20 off. I believe you can browse through their entire inventory before signing up to see if they have the right styles for you.

Now let's talk about entertainment because after a long day of work and wrangling the children, I loved having a book or a show to look forward to. I read close to 20 books this year, some were more literary and some were just pure guilty pleasures but my favorite book of the year that I've already gifted to multiple people is [Maybe You Should Talk to Someone: A Therapist, HER Therapist, and Our Lives Revealed](#) by Lori Gottlieb. I loved this memoir because it really dug into the emotional journey that all humans go through, how we're so often our own worst enemies, and how the work we really need to do is usually within ourselves. As for my favorite guilty pleasure it probably was the [To All the Boys I Loved Before](#) trilogy by Jenny Han. There is

nothing sweeter than teenage romance, though I am so glad I am no longer in that very angsty part of my life.

With so much good TV these days, I also enjoyed a lot of wonderful shows. I love a good spirited reality competition show, and 2 new ones I discovered this year were Making It and Songland. For those of you who watch the Great British Baking Show, and I know many of you do, Making It follows the exact same format, and their studio even look identical. It's hosted by Amy Poehler, yes my hero Leslie Knope from Parks and Rec, and Nick Offerman, aka Ron Swanson and it's a show about makers and crafters. Each episode has 2 challenges. A smaller challenge where they might have to make something small, like a snowglobe that represents your favorite childhood place. Then there's an elimination challenge where they make something larger, like turning a portable shed into a usable space. It's the perfect show to watch with young kids because it's so wholesome and just really inspires you to get out your glue gun and make something! They just wrapped up season 2, which you can find on Hulu or probably the NBC app.

And then the second reality competition show that I loved this year was Songland, which I found on Hulu. Each episode 4 song writers compete for a chance to have their song produced by a famous musician like John Legend or Meghan Trainor. I am someone who loves music but know nothing about music. I can't read music, I don't understand any music vocabulary and the way that a song gets constructed feels like magic to me, so it was so fun to see someone pitch a song and then a team of producers and knowledgeable musicians offer immediate feedback and changes to make the song better. Because that kind of skill and ability is so foreign to me, watching their process just blows my mind. Watching a song get made actually reminded me of the way our meal planning sessions work. Someone offers a start, and we build on it together to make it better and better. I'd like to think if people watched us work, they would think it looked magical too.

As for non-reality tv shows, I finally started watching the West Wing thanks to Netflix. Oh man, so good. There are 156 episodes, and I'm trying to slowly ration it out and really savor all that good dialogue.

One of the other things that has made me happy this year was going to the movies by myself. I started doing this a few years ago because I love going to the movies and enjoying a bucket of buttered popcorn. Unfortunately my husband doesn't feel the same way, and it can be hard to coordinate a movie date with girlfriends, who are all really busy too, so I just started going by myself. I have a movie pass from Cinemark. I pay \$9.99 per month for it, which gets me into 1 movie. If I don't use the credit it rolls over. On nights I want to go, my husband does bedtime while I head to the movies, and it's such a treat. Some of the movies I saw in theater that I really loved this year were the animated Spiderman movie, Booksmart, Knives Out, Hobbs and Shaw and my favorite of the year, Parasite.

As I mentioned before, I love music. Lizzo's newest album was my favorite album of the year. I rocked out to her voice on many pregnant walks and Charlie literally came bursting into the world to a Lizzo song. I got to see her in concert last month and a few months before that my husband and I went to our first concert in maybe 5 years. We went to see Kishi Bashi who is just such a talented musician. I'll link to a few of my favorites in the show notes.

So this year has been filled with fun exercise sessions, high waisted leggings, and lots of entertainment but my favorite thing have been the people I get to surround myself with every day. Because of parenthood, I've managed to make a lot of new friends who have been so supportive. I was worried I was at a point in my life where I wouldn't make any more close friends but that's just not been true, and I'm really grateful for all the wonderful friends in my life.

Other people who have made this year so fulfilling for me were my parents. They moved from Maryland to Las Vegas 2 years ago to be closer to us and they come and help us a lot. I don't think we could manage 3 kids and 2 jobs without their frequent help and I am so thankful for that. I don't know how families do it without the help of grandparents -- I send you all strength.

And even though the everyday routines like getting everybody dressed, everybody fed, cleaning up the daily kid messes can definitely leave me weary and exasperated, the things that give me energy are the times when there is no schedule and no destination. When our family of 5 is just hanging out, playing, being silly, snuggling in bed together. Those make all the craziness so worth it. I think as parents, especially in the age of Instagram, we feel so much pressure to create these special moments for our kids, but the best ones are the ones that aren't scheduled and don't take a lot of work because you are so much more relaxed and that's one of the best gifts you could give to your kid.

Cook Smarts 2020 theme is all about doing less so please let us help you do less so you can have more of these relaxed moments in life.

And that was my 2019. It was a full year, and I'm very grateful for all of it. And even though I did a whole episode on New Year's resolutions for you, I realized that I haven't shared mine with you. My husband and I are going to try to do a tech sabbath 1 day a week where we'll go device-free from Friday night to Saturday night. I know it won't be perfect but I'm excited to start practicing. I'll keep you posted on our progress!

Again please share your resolutions and goals for 2020 with me. I'd love to hear them. You can reach out to me on Instagram @cooksmarts or @jessdangcs or shoot me a text or leave a voice message at 650-386-0290.

I'm excited to really grow the podcast this year but to do that, I need your help. You know you have a friend who has made the same resolution every year, so tell them about today's episode. We're also doing another reviews giveaway. If you haven't left a review on Apple Podcast, please do that! After you do, just take a screenshot of it and text it to 650-386-0290. If you've

already left a review on iTunes, you can contribute a voicemail review at the same number, which again is 650-386-0290. We'll pick one review at random in a few weeks, and you'll get a \$100 Amazon gift card.

Speaking of reviews, I wanted to share kathlatts' review: "I have wanted to join Cook Smarts for some time now and after listening to the podcast, I am convinced that this is the next step for me and my cooking life. I love the advice about not just cooking, but planning, organizing, and being a good provider. I really appreciate how Jess tells me that I am doing a great job by providing my family home-cooked meals and even used her words to my son the other night: 'I provided you with good, healthy food. Now it is your choice whether or not to eat it.' I have needed to hear that and say it for a long time!! Thanks!!"

Thank you kathlatts. I love telling people they're doing a great job! You are the winner of a Cook Smarts tote bag -- just reach out to us at hello@cooksmarts.com. If we read your review in a future episode, you've got a colorful and functional Cook Smarts bag waiting for you.

With that, happy, happy new year and new decade. I hope that with my system and steps, you are able to keep your New Year's resolutions. I'm so excited to kick off this year and decade with you and the Cook Smarts community. 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!