

# Full Catastrophe Cooking

*By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author*

I want to talk to you today about full catastrophe cooking, or how to eat healthy when you have too much going on. My wife and I are getting experience with this right now. In the past 6 months, we sold our house in the city, did a 5-month stint of house sitting, bought a house in the country and are in the process of moving our businesses and contents of our old home to our new home. One more detail: my wife is 8 months pregnant.

We have been living in our new home for the last 2 weeks, with a mattress and no other furniture. Our new kitchen is far from new and the home inspector called it 100% depreciated. Even our stove didn't work until a few days ago. We are in the midst of the full catastrophe, a line from Zorba the Greek about living into the fullness of life.

Jon-Kabat Zinn, a yoga and meditation teacher wrote a book called Full Catastrophe Living on how to live a good life in the midst of the realities of life using yoga and meditation. I have been calling our cooking experiences of the last few weeks, "Full Catastrophe Cooking".

We have managed to eat fairly well during a time of high stress, sure, there is the occasional burger and fries or bag of potato chips, but we have had many delicious and healthy meals cooked on our camp stove or eaten at restaurants between one place or another.

So, how can you eat healthy even when you have little time, are in the middle of a big move or other change, and are under a lot of stress? Here are a few tips that I think might help:

- 1) Make a commitment** – When the craziness of life is swirling around you it is easy to be swept up in the mayhem and lose your center. I know when I lose my center, I start eating poorly which in turn makes me lose my center even more. When I recommit to healthy eating, it can help me feel better both physically and emotionally.

- 2) **Get everyone else on board** – When you or someone in your family is going through a hard time, everyone can be thrown off center. If you want to be really successful at re-committing to healthy eating and cooking then see if you can get your family, friends and/or roommates to re-commit as well.
- 3) **Find healthy recipes that you enjoy and that are quick to make** – Take a look through some cookbooks or on-line recipe sites and find recipes that are easy to make and that look tasty. Try a new recipe or two every week until you have 8 to 10 favorite recipes that you know you will enjoy.
- 4) **Have a pantry full of healthy possibilities** – I know that if I have ice cream in the freezer or cookies in the pantry, I will eat them, so I don't keep either on hand. My wife and I will occasionally have one of these foods when we go out, but we don't keep them in the house. I like to stock our kitchen with lots of fresh fruit, nuts, peanut butter, cheese and other snacks that are both satisfying and good for us.
- 5) **Have the right tools** – Over the last few months I have been writing about cooking tools that not only will save you time but make cooking a breeze. The Instant Pot, Crockpot, sheet pan or Dutch oven all give you super delicious meals with only a few minutes of prep. These tools make it possible for even the most stressed out, overly busy person to make a healthy, tasty meal in less time than it takes to drive to a take out restaurant. Other important time saving cooking tools include a good sharp knife, cutting board and a food processor.
- 6) **Ask for help** – There are times when we are just going through too much to even consider cooking at all. Asking friends for help cooking or asking to be a recipient of a meal train are ways to have others support you. It is hard for many of us to ask for help but remember that most people love to contribute to others. We have friends who recently had a baby and someone created a meal train for them. We brought them a meal and were one of the first to meet the new baby. You can set up a meal train for yourself or others at [www.mealtrain.com](http://www.mealtrain.com).
- 7) **Find good places to eat out** – If you are really stressed out, going through a hard time or are super busy, then eating out can be a decent alternative. The trick is going to restaurants that have healthy foods you really want to eat. Yes, you can get a salad at McDonald's, but are you really going to? And if you do, are you going to enjoy it? Make a list of restaurants in your area that have healthy foods that you will enjoy. Go to those restaurants when are going to eat out.
- 8) **Enjoy the ride** – Finally, the whole point of full catastrophe living and cooking is to not to take everything too seriously. If you need to have an occasional burger and fries than do it. Just try not to make it your daily habit. Enjoy the journey and eat as healthy as you can along the way.

