



## Time Saving Kitchen Tools for Healthy Eating: Part 1—The Instant Pot

*By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author*

When I have asked people over the years what their biggest barrier is to eating healthier, the overwhelming answer is not having enough time. We are all extremely busy these days and our diet often reflects that. Over the next few months I will be introducing you to some different cooking tools that can save you an incredible amount of time in the kitchen and have you cooking healthy meals again with minimal effort. This month I want to talk about the new versatile field of pressure cookers that have been introduced to the market, the most well-known being the Instant Pot. I had heard of the Instant Pot over the last few years but hadn't purchased one until about 6 months ago. Since then I have used it to make some of my favorite Mediterranean soups and stews along with cooking dried beans from scratch, hard- and soft-boiled eggs and perfectly cooked rice.

When I was a kid, pressure cookers were considered to be amazing, but dangerous tools. There were stories of them exploding and covering the unsuspecting cook with horrible burns. As a kid, my Dad always told me to stay away from our always sizzling pressure cooker and my Mom didn't use it that much because of fear of explosion. This fear has been diminished with the new pressure cookers as they all come with safety mechanisms to prevent you from opening them before the pressure is released. You still have to be careful not to overfill them and to put the lid on securely, but overall it is leaps and bounds ahead of the pressure cooker of yesteryear.

**So, what can you do with the Instant Pot?** I find that it is wonderful for soups and stews and rivals a slow cooker for flavor and tenderness, but it might take 20 minutes instead of 6 hours to finish cooking your dishes. Many of these are also slow cookers so you can still make the 6-hour version if so desired. There are certain foods that I have found don't work so well in the Instant Pot, one of them being whole chicken breast. I think because of the dryness of chicken breast it is better to slow cook or poach it in order to get it tender. Besides that, though I have found meat, chicken thighs, pork all come out amazingly tender in around 20 minutes.

My other favorite thing to do with the instant pot so far is making perfectly hard boiled and soft-boiled eggs. Add a cup of water to the bottom, put some eggs on the metal rack that comes with it, press 5 minutes for hard boiled eggs and 3 minutes for soft boiled and voila you have the perfect eggs. I always find the most aggravating part of hard-boiled eggs is getting the shells off, but when you make them in the pressure cooker, the shells peel off super easily.

Another wonderful attribute of the pressure cooker is to be able to cook dried beans in 20-25 minutes without soaking them! They come out tender and ready for immediate eating.

I haven't tried everything that the Instant Pot can do yet. For example, it is supposed to make incredible Greek yogurt. This is not only a time saver but will also save you a lot of money!

### Here are a few other recipes you can make in the Instant Pot:

- Spaghetti with meat sauce
- No-knead bread
- Perfectly steamed rice
- Beef Stew
- Chicken Cacciatore
- Greens with Potatoes
- Split Pea Soup
- Chicken Noodle Soup
- Oatmeal

**Is the Instant Pot worth buying?** Of course, it depends on your own budget, cooking styles and lifestyle. Most of the new pressure cookers cost under \$100. Consider how much money you spend on eating out. If you cut back just a bit, you may be able to afford the purchase and it would pay for itself in a very short time. If cooking differently gets you to cook even one healthy meal per week then I think it's worth it. If you use it once and then never again, it's probably not worth it, so think carefully about your decision. I do think the new pressure cookers are a great time saving tool for the healthy cook and is a great appliance for most people.

Let me know if you buy one and if you like it. If you already have one, let me know some of your favorite recipes. Happy cooking!

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