

# Feeding My Family

by Mackenzie Krauter

**How embracing culture & community changed my perspective on food.**

This year I turned 30. My life has been really great, but one challenge that I have faced since my youth is body insecurity, which naturally made my relationship with food a bit tumultuous... okay, very tumultuous. I am going to share with you my food journey and how embracing my love for food, cooking, and community, helps me lead my family of four into vibrant living and health.

The first moment that I experienced shame regarding how I looked was on a family vacation. At six years of age, I would swim all day by the lake house in the hot sun with my cousins. Suddenly, looking down at my red and white striped swimsuit I noticed my stomach had grown a little pudgy. My eyes were opened. For the first time I felt self-conscious about my body. As a pre-teen, photos were embarrassing reminders that my body was not what I wanted it to be. I thought my face looked puffy and swollen like a balloon. Joining a volleyball team quickly got me into shape from all the conditioning and long tournament days but a new challenge emerged: now it became difficult to not compare my body to the other players. I was never the tallest, the thinnest, or the most athletic. At the same time, I loved food! As a kid, I would beg to watch cooking shows and loved to throw parties, but what I most enjoyed was the time spent in the kitchen with my mother. She was famous in our community for her soup recipes and at one point she was selling mason jars of soup for people to buy at our church. One day, in preparation for these large pots of soup we cut onions and cried until our make-up ran down our faces. Our laughter filled the kitchen as we threw open the windows for fresh air.

Unfortunately, joyful food experiences were quickly associated with the feeling of my body never being good enough. Wishing away my love for food, I rationalized, if only I didn't love food so much I would have more self-control around it. The irony is that my passion for food would be a tool that would help me to heal my body and my mind. After high school, I moved around a lot—living with some family members

at times, living with friends at times. Like a chameleon, I would adapt to whatever environment that I was in, in regards to health. For example, if someone I lived with was on a diet, I was more than happy to join in. If I lived with a runner, it was easy to tag along. When it came to making health decisions on my own, I didn't take much initiative. When I tried to improve my habits I quickly felt overwhelmed and discouraged. Sometimes I would start a diet but quickly lose motivation and inevitably fail. It was frustrating, and I hate being frustrated with things that I love...like food.

During college, I studied abroad for several months in Oaxaca, Mexico while I was finishing my Spanish degree. Each student was assigned to a host family who served us traditional homecooked meals. Breakfast was a meal I often neglected at home, normally just rushing out the door with a cup of coffee, but here in Oaxaca, breakfast was served promptly at 8 am and lunch was served at 1 pm. Fascinated by the cooking methods and the authentic dishes I begged to participate in the kitchen duties so that I could learn some of the recipes, but I was quickly shooed away by Martita, the house grandma who was also our chef. There were no food groups restricted; no gluten-free, or dairy-free, and no accommodations. We ate meals made with whole (or minimally processed) foods based on locality, seasonality, and affordability. Surprisingly, the desire to snack throughout the day and the cravings I was constantly battling at home were diminished when I started the day with a hearty meal. Throughout the trip, I began to feel confident in my own skin. My weight came into balance and my inflammation reduced.

At home, eating was all about me: what I wanted, what I was craving, whatever diet I was on. In Mexico, my eating life was connected to the community. Meals had more purpose than just appeasing hunger. Food was utilized to create space to gather together and practice Spanish with my roommates. Mealtime created a ritualistic pause twice a day, a moment of reprieve to enjoy fresh produce with lime juice squeezed on top, or the concoction of mole negro that had simmered on the stove since yesterday afternoon filling the house with its aroma. The other houseguests would settle in at the table, and we would shoot the breeze about each other's lives. There was no time to sulk or worry about my body. Meaningful connection with others was making me more healthy by default, not to mention the adventure of exploring this beautiful city on foot with good friends and walking anywhere we wanted to go.

In Oaxaca, food plays an important role in community identity. In the market, the purity of the Oaxacan food

culture was clearly visible. Corn, beans, meats, in-season fruits and vegetables, and spices. One day breakfast at the house might -be a quesadilla con flor de calabaza (a handmade tortilla filled with Oaxacan cheese and squash blossoms). This meal was just a combination of ingredients that everyone around me was eating in one form or another. There are infinite ways to combine and prepare the beautiful ingredients from this region and I was honored to be able to experience them on a plate. When my trip ended and I returned home, I wanted to continue these lifestyle changes but without a strategy in place I quickly fell back into my old habits. Fast forward a few years, now I'm married and have two incredible daughters.

Having children gave me new inspiration to find a strategy for health for our family. My daughters have an opportunity to grow up being in tune with their bodies; to know they are beautiful and strong, but also that there is so much more to life than their appearance. Our home can be a place where food is a blessing and not a curse and where moving and strengthening our bodies is fun and not a chore. They can learn what community looks like and how we can be there for each other and use food to do that. I hired a nutritional therapist and to my surprise, she was not very interested in my weight. She was more curious about my energy levels, my digestion, and my hormone balance. We focused on what foods made me feel good or bad, with a goal of feeling satisfied after and between meals. Real fulfillment, not deprivation, was my new aim. Everyone's food journey is personal and not one size fits all.

This year has taught me that there is so much more to health than a number on the scale. This was the starting place I needed to begin to view my health journey from a lens of peace instead of striving. Rather than looking for a quick fix, I started to play the long game when it came to my health. It wasn't overnight, but over time, my mindset towards my body became much more gentle, kind, and empowering. Embracing my love for food and cooking helps me to lead my family into a lifestyle of eating whole, diverse, and local foods. Frequenting our summer farmers' markets and getting to know those that produce food in my area as well as being more intentional to invite friends and family into our home and share meals together has shown me that food can be a means to bless, heal, help, and celebrate my family and others.



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## Here are a few keys that have helped me adjust my mindset & find peace with food.

### 1) Eat Breakfast.

There is a proverb that says "One who is full loathes honey from the comb, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet" so, if I wait to find food until I am starving, I will just grab whatever looks good at the moment but may not be beneficial long term. But when I make breakfast a priority then I'm able to make rational food decisions. Usually my breakfast consists of scrambled eggs with a small piece of toast and some avocado, or fried eggs and bacon, or a bowl of oatmeal with some fruit.

### 2) Slow down.

Plate the food so that it looks beautiful and is a reasonable portion. Eat slowly. Be aware of how your body feels and if your stomach is satisfied. Enjoy your company first and the food second.

### 3) Balance food groups.

I still eat carbs, but I try to make our family meals a balance of carbs, fat, and protein. Protein and fat give the energy needed to sustain and satisfy between meals. Toddler plates with separate compartments are great for preparing lunch for my daughters because they help me consider what food groups are on the plate and it can teach them how a balanced meal should look.

### 4) Get creative with vegetables.

Learn how to make yummy dressing and sauces for that big salad or to use as a dip for veggies. Take your kids to the farmers' market and let them pick out something new and then prepare it at home together. Chicken and vegetable curries, stir fry dishes, and soups are a great way to incorporate more veggies into your diet. There are so many unique ways to add veggies to a dish that doesn't feel like eating a side of that mixed vegetable medley from the freezer aisle.

# CHORIZO-POTATO BREAKFAST TOSTADA

Chorizo and potatoes are a classic Oaxacan combination & every time I eat them together it transports me right back to my study abroad days! Try my twist here with a delicious tostada, all the flavors meld together for a vibrant & succulent breakfast option. - Mackenzie Krauter

## Instructions:

1. To make chorizo potato mixture. Set oven to 400F. Dice potatoes into 1cm cubes. Place in a ziplock bag & add olive oil, garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, chipotle chili powder, sea salt, & cracked black pepper. Seal & shake bag vigorously. Dump potatoes out onto a parchment-lined baking sheet & spread them into one even layer.

2. Bake potatoes for 15 minutes. Then turn oven to broil. Broil potatoes for 5 minutes, flip/mix them with a spatula then broil another 5 minutes until crispy & golden on the outside & soft on the inside.

3. Dice the white onion. Add to a saute pan with ground chorizo. Saute chorizo & onions for 7 minutes on medium heat until chorizo is cooked & onions are translucent. Add drained

diced green chilis & saute them for another 3-4 minutes. Then add lime juice.

4. Add the baked diced potatoes to the chorizo mixture & mix together, coating all potatoes with the mixture.

5. To make the tostadas. Prepare a skillet with 2 tsp olive oil on medium/high heat & fry each side of tortillas until slightly browned and crispy.

6. Remove the tortillas to plate & fry eggs over-medium.

7. Assemble the tostadas. Scoop a layer of chorizo-potato mixture onto tortilla. Layer on the fried egg & top as desired with toppings: sour cream, chopped cilantro, sliced avocado, crumbled queso fresco, & pickled jalapeños.

2 lbs gold potatoes (diced 1 cm cubes)  
1 tsp garlic powder  
1 tsp onion powder  
½ tsp oregano  
¼ tsp chipotle chili powder (add more or omit based on spice preference)  
1 1/2 tsp sea salt  
1/8 tsp cracked black pepper  
1/2 white onion  
1/3 cup olive oil, + 2 tbs olive oil for pan-frying tostadas  
9oz ground pork chorizo  
7oz can diced green chilies  
1 tsp lime juice  
8-10 eggs  
8-10 corn tortillas  
sour cream, cilantro, avocado (sliced)  
queso fresco, pickled jalapeños

