

ANGEL

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“It was a classic of the 1950s,” said François, “and I think Rachel will singlehandedly make this an essential dessert in America again.”

GRANDMA LU'S LEMON ANGEL PIE

Serves 6 to 8.

Note: This is Rachel Swan's version of her grandmother's angel pie recipe, which occasionally appears on the menu at her south Minneapolis bakery, Pie & Mighty. The key to making a meringue crust that doesn't crack is to not open the oven during baking or after. The longer you can leave the oven closed, the better. “Here's the thing with this pie: The most important ingredient, not listed, is time,” Swan said. Swan calls her lemon filling “goo.” She suggests pushing the filling and the whipped cream all the way in toward the edge of the crust, an act she calls “tuckle the goo.” This recipe must be prepared in advance.

For the meringue crust:

Coconut oil, for greasing
4 egg whites, room temperature
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar,
or 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice

or vinegar (see Note)
1 cup sugar

For the lemon filling:

4 egg yolks, room temperature
1/2 cup sugar
1/3 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice (from about 2 lemons)

For the whipped cream:

2 cups heavy whipping cream
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
Zest of 1 lemon

Directions

Preheat oven to 275 degrees Fahrenheit. Generously grease a pie plate with coconut oil.

To prepare the meringue crust: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large bowl using an electric mixer, combine the egg whites and cream of tartar (or lemon juice or vinegar) and beat on medium-high speed until foamy, about 2 minutes. Gradually add the sugar and beat until the mixture is stiff and glossy, up to 10 minutes. Spread the meringue onto the pie plate and shape the crust up the sides with a rubber spatula, hollowing the center and making decorative dollops around the edges. (To spread the meringue more evenly, use a piping bag to pipe a spiral around the bottom and pipe rings around the edges of the plate up to the rim. Pipe a decorative rim around the top to look like a crimped edge.)



Rachel Swan shows a cross section of a properly finished angel pie in Minneapolis.

Richard Tsong-Taatarii/Minneapolis Star-Tribune

Bake for 1 hour. When the timer goes off, turn off the oven but do not open the door to remove it until the oven has fully cooled — at least one hour and up to overnight.

To prepare the lemon filling: In a small stainless-steel bowl, beat egg yolks, adding the sugar until thick. Add lemon juice and place the bowl over a pot, filled about a quarter of the way with boiling water (double-boil-

er method). Stir constantly until mixture is thick and mounds slightly when dropped from a spoon, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and cover with plastic wrap on the surface of the filling, to prevent a film from forming. Cool completely.

To assemble the pie: Make the whipped cream. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large bowl using an electric mixer,

combine the heavy cream and sugar until thick. Add vanilla.

Take the meringue crust and lightly knock down the inside of the shell, which may have puffed up during baking, making a cavern underneath the top edge. Spread half the whipped cream into the shell, reaching all the way into the sides (aka “tuckle the goo”). Spoon in the lemon filling and smooth it over the whipped cream with a

spoon or offset spatula. Some of the filling and cream will mix together.

Put the rest of the whipped cream into a piping bag (or a sandwich bag with the corner snipped off) and pipe the cream around the pie where the meringue shell meets the filling. Sprinkle the lemon zest all over the top of the pie. Refrigerate the pie at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

Developing a brain-heathy menu plan

By **GRETCHEN MCKAY**

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PITTSBURGH — Laura Ali has helped countless clients fine-tune their diets to promote healthy eating habits in her three decades as a registered dietitian and culinary nutritionist, 16 of them in a clinical setting at the Cancer Institute at UPMC, now Hillman Cancer Institute.

Good nutrition is a cornerstone of good health, with study after study showing that adults who eat an adequate, well-balanced diet not only live longer, but also lower their risk of heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers.

Yet it was Ali's own genetics that got her thinking about the new eating plan known as the MIND diet, which is meant to support memory. She was so struck by its proposed benefits that during the pandemic, she wrote a cookbook with 65 simple recipes based on its recommendations. Published in March, it's called “Mind Diet for Two” (Rockridge Press, \$14.99)

Both Ali and her husband have a family history of Alzheimer's disease and have watched close relatives suffer from dementia. So as she inched toward middle age, the Pittsburgh native grew increasingly intrigued by the role food plays in long-term cognitive health. Hoping to avoid the same fate, “I wanted to learn more to see if there were things we could do to slow down or prevent dementia altogether,” she said.

Her reading led her to the work researchers at Rush University in Chicago have been doing with elderly residents via the MIND diet, the first eating plan that focuses on foods that specifically support and improve cognitive health.

Created to slow the loss of brain function that happens with age, the MIND diet combines two diets considered to be super-good for the heart: the mostly plant-based Mediterranean diet, and the low-sodium DASH diet, developed in

the 1990s by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute to prevent and treat high blood pressure.

Both build meals around fruits, vegetables and whole grains, with varying amounts of lean meats, fish, sweets and healthy fats allowed per day or week. The MIND diet takes it a step further by encouraging regular consumption of 10 types of “brain healthy” foods — berries, leafy greens, other vegetables, nuts, beans, whole grains, fish, poultry, olive oil and red wine — and limiting foods in five groups including red meats, butter and stick margarine, cheese, pastries and sweets, and fried or fast food, because they are high in saturated fat and trans fat and known to increase cholesterol.

When people age, Ali writes, plaque builds up on the brain, causing the communication system to short-circuit and interfere with the brain's messages to the body. Substances called flavonoids, found in foods like fruits, vegetables, cocoa and wine, contain antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which protect the body's cells from damage and reduce inflammation.

That's important because Alzheimer's patients tend to have brains that are inflamed, while people with hypertension and diabetes are at a great risk for stroke, which is a major factor for vascular dementia and Alzheimer's.

“It's just a healthy way of eating,” Ali says. Research suggests that the MIND diet lowered the risk of Alzheimer's by as much as 53% in participants who rigorously followed to the diet to a T, and by about 35% in those who adhered to it moderately well. But improvements start to weaken at about year 7.

Ali says she knew the cookbook would probably strike a chord with home cooks because people today are so much more aware of what they should be eating, and the role that good nutrition can have in maintaining and improving

health. While we still want the convenience of drive-through, or eating quickly on the run or at our desks, “there's true desire to eat better,” she says.

In deciding which foods to include, Ali — a lifelong cook who has done culinary consulting for Giant Eagle, StarKist and Del Monte Foods — chose 65 recipes that use ingredients readily available in any grocery store. She also steered clear of recipes that required special equipment like an air fryer or Instant Pot because not everyone has one.

“I approached it as what [the average person] typically eats,” she says — quick breakfasts, simple lunches and mains that can be made in 30 minutes or less.

Many are gluten- or dairy-free, and all come with nutritional information, along with prep and cook times. She also includes a servings chart, kitchen tips and a seven-day sample menu to get you started.

The cookbook is unique in that all the recipes serve just two instead of the standard four to six for a family. That's because by the time most people are worried about dementia, they are often cooking for two most of the time as empty nesters.

“At this point in life, people are often caring for elderly relatives that may have dementia and are seeing the real effects it has. I think they become worried about their own health as they age.”

With food waste a growing problem, people also don't want to have to throw away leftovers.

“But most can easily be doubled for four or more,” she says.

If you're someone who doesn't already eat a lot of fruits, grains, fish or leafy vegetables, it can take some time to adjust to the MIND diet — for your body as well as your palate. (The increased fiber can cause bloating, gas or constipation.) She suggests starting easy by sneaking some of the ingredients into your

dishes — say, add some spinach or salmon to your scrambled eggs, serve a leafy salad with dinner, or stir vegetable into your pasta.

Tougher still may be learning to limit favorites like cheese, butter and steak. But the daily glass of red wine you're allowed, she says with a laugh, makes up for it.

“It's a relatively easy way of eating,” she says.

BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIE

Packed with essential nutrients, fiber and antioxidants, blueberries are one powerful little berry. Research suggests they can lower the risk of dementia and support a healthy, well-functioning immune system. Kefir, a fermented milk drink, is also thought to have positive impacts on brain health due to its probiotic content.

This tangy smoothie comes together in minutes and has just 261 calories, making it a perfect (and healthy) breakfast or mid-afternoon snack.

1 ½ cups kefir
1 5.3-ounce cup nonfat Greek yogurt
¼ cup finely chopped walnuts
1 cup fresh blueberries
2 or 3 ice cubes

In a blender or food processor, place the kefir, yogurt, walnuts, blueberries and ice cubes. Blend about 1 minute on high, until mixture is completely combined.

Divide between 2 glasses and enjoy.

Makes 2 smoothies.
— “Mind Diet for Two” by Laura Ali (Rockridge Press, 2022, \$15)

SOBA NOODLES WITH SPICY PEANUT SAUCE

This spicy noodle dish takes less than 15 minutes to prepare, and is packed with MIND-di-

et friendly ingredients. Soba noodles, made with buckwheat, are rich in fiber and also contain flavonoids, which can reduce inflammation. The real star is the edamame, one of the few vegetables that is a complete protein.

For peanut sauce

¼ cup creamy peanut butter
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon lime zest
1 tablespoon lime juice
½ teaspoon toasted sesame oil
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon freshly grated ginger

For noodles

1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup shredded carrots
½ cup thinly sliced bell pepper strips
1 cup shelled edamame (thawed, if frozen)
1 tablespoons sliced scallions, green and white parts
6 ounces soba noodles
¼ cup shredded red cabbage
¼ cup peanuts, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

In medium bowl, whisk together the peanut butter, soy sauce, lime zest, lime juice, sesame oil, red pepper flakes and ginger until well blended. Set aside.

In medium skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add carrots, bell pepper and edamame. Cook for 2 minutes, until just hot. Add scallions and stir for 30 seconds. Remove from heat.

In a large saucepan, bring 6 to 8 cups water to a boil over high heat. Add soba noodles and cook according to package directions until just al dente, 4 to 6 minutes. Drain and put the noodles back in the saucepan.

Immediately toss the soba

noodles with the peanut sauce to coat. Add cooked vegetables and toss well.

Divide between 2 plates and top with cabbage, peanuts and cilantro.

Serves 2.

— “Mind Diet for Two” by Laura Ali (Rockridge Press, 2022, \$15)

SPICY AVOCADO DRESSING

Avocados are rich in monounsaturated fat and potassium, both of which are important for blood pressure control and may help improve blood flow to the brain. Use as a spread for sandwiches, toast or tacos, or as a thick and creamy salad dressing. Also works as a dip with crudites.

1 medium ripe avocado, pitted, peeled and diced
1 teaspoon lime zest
3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
1 tablespoon chopped jalapeno pepper
2 teaspoons chopped garlic (about 2 cloves)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Place ingredients in the bowl of a food processor. Process until completely combined and no large pieces are visible.

Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 1 week. (The lime juice will keep the dressing from turning brown.)

Makes 3/4 cup.

— “Mind Diet for Two” by Laura Ali (Rockridge Press, 2022, \$15)



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