



EAT SMART

✦ THE LATEST NUTRITIONAL KNOW-HOW FOR A BETTER BODY ✦

MAKE IT YOURSELF

Could you make everything you put on your plate from scratch? One writer does the legwork to find out...

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Atkins would approve...

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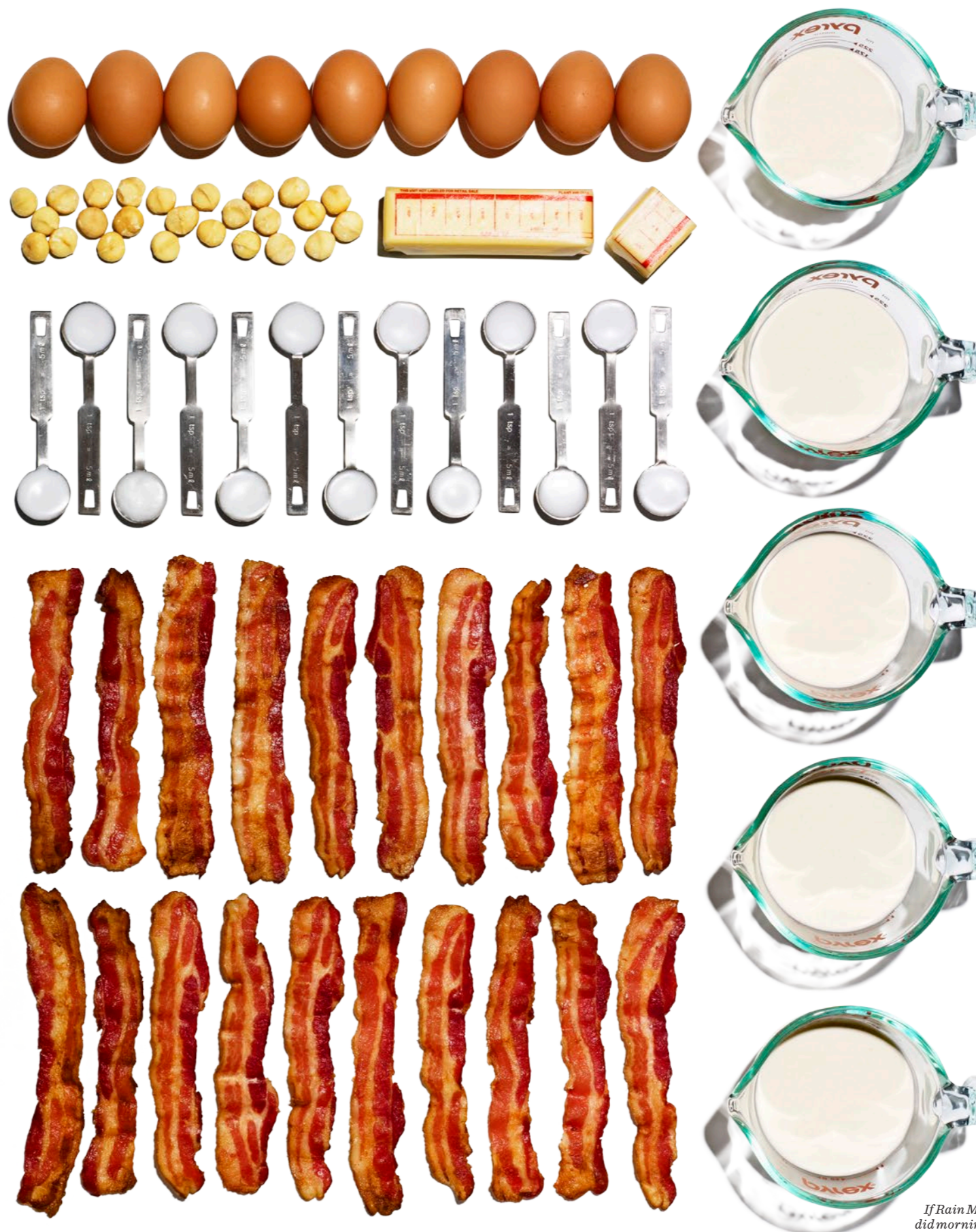
It's 11.30pm on a Tuesday and I'm tending to my sprouter. The sky is thick and dark outside, but here inside my kitchen, my little plastic seed sprouter blooms with bright-green wheatgrass. I add a bit of water and then head off to bed – so exhausted. The reason? For the last three weeks I've been on a mission: to make every single thing I eat from scratch.

First, a little background. I'm healthy: I buy organic when I can; I avoid sugar most of the time. But fitting my tussle for health around long hours at work means I often throw money at the problem. My fruit and vegetables come bound in plastic. So does my lunchtime protein fix. My desk drawer is crammed with oatcakes and processed nut butters, my fridge, stacked with yoghurt pots.

But I could go one better. I could make everything I eat. Over the past few months, I've lost count of the number of people who've practically purred when talking about their home-made almond milk. I've also been told, between gasps of pure ecstasy, that you've not tasted *real* peanut butter until you've ground your own nuts to a thick, unctuous paste. And you're no one, it appears, unless you're hot-smoking something from your stovetop. But unless you're Gwyneth Paltrow, who has the time?

The kicker: research shows it's worth it for the sake of your waistline as well as your bank balance. The University of Birmingham found time and energy spent cooking meals reduces your calorie intake by a massive 50%. Hence the sprouter. But is it possible to make all the stuff you'd usually buy around a hectic nine-to-eight? And is the nutritional and time cost worth it? I cancelled my social life for a whole month to find out.

You're no one unless you're hot-smoking



If Rain Man did mornings

Almond milk

After spending half an hour trying to locate a 'cheesecloth' on the internet, I finally got started on making my favourite fridge staple. I love almond milk, but many of the brands now contain artificial sweeteners and preservatives: not good. Spurred on, I soaked 250g of almonds overnight (making them easier to blend) and then threw them in a Vitamix with 3½ pints water for a few seconds until it formed a brown paste. I then squeezed the paste through a cheesecloth (beware: it looks like an intestine) until all the liquid was drained. Not wearing an apron was a mistake. I got a pint of 'milk' out of 250g of nuts, re-blended it with 1 date and 1 tsp cinnamon and boom! Fresh almond milk – no nasties.

DIY
Per 100ml
73 cals
Protein 2.6g
Carbs 3.1g
Sat fat 0.5g

Shop-bought
Per 100ml
24 cals
Protein 0.5g
Carbs 3.2g
Sat fat 3g

Faff factor: 4/10
Time cost: 15 mins (plus 8 hours soaking)
Purse damage: £5 on a box of almonds.
Worth it? No. Making it means more vitamin E, omega-3s and -6s, but an unsweetened brand still gives you nutritional benefits without the bother.

Wheatgrass

Shelling out £2 a shot for this nutrient-dense, sugar-craving-curtailling juice shot can be a costly morning routine. Sure, you can go for powder, but it's better fresh. With the Lexen Healthy Sprouter (£27.95, ukjuicers.com), you can grow your own – and I mean total *Jumanji*-style out of control. You'll need a handful of grass and a cup of water to get a couple of shots out of it. After another 10 days and you'll get round two out of it, but you'll need to replant seeds after that.

DIY
Per serve (3g)
15 cals
Protein 1g
Carbs 2g
Sat fat 0g

Shop-bought
Per serve (3g)
15 cals
Protein 1g
Carbs 2g
Sat fat 0g

Faff factor: 8/10
Time cost: Five days to grow it, 10 minutes to juice it. Almost too easy.
Purse damage: £5 for seeds (plus sprouter). Works out cheaper in the long run than £2 per shot.
Worth it? Yes.





Greek yoghurt

Yes, it looks like a nappy bin, an electric yoghurt maker (£19.99, lakeland.co.uk) is way more fun. First, boil milk, let it cool, stir in 2 tbsp live yoghurt then pour it into the maker. Switch it on overnight, refrigerate in the morning and you're set for the week. Once you get over the fact you need to buy yoghurt to make yoghurt, it's all good.

DIY

Per 100g
60 cal
Protein 3.4g
Carbs 4.8g
Sat fat 2g



Shop-bought

Per 100g
65 cal
Protein 7g
Carbs 2.8g
Sat fat 0g

Faff factor: 8/10

Time cost: 10 mins preparation; 8 hours refrigeration.

Purse damage: 90p. 900ml milk makes 1 litre yoghurt. Use it to start your next batch.

Worth it? Yes. Shop-bought yoghurts often contain xanthan gum, which can counteract all the probiotics.

Smoked salmon

When I'm being good, salmon and eggs is my go-to breakfast, those handy M&S packs of hot-smoked salmon and chicken are the reason I'll never get on the property ladder. But my new smoker (£33, cameronssmoker.com) made forking out a thing of the past. Just sprinkle 1½ tbsp woodchips in the smoker (£3, cameronssmoker.com), season the fish with a squeeze of lemon and place on top of the tray on a low flame. A satisfying curl of smoke came from the bourbon-smoked woodchips almost immediately. Twenty minutes later, I had a perfectly smoked fillet.

DIY

Per serve
101 cal
Protein 15.2g
Carbs 0.3g
Sat fat 3.3g



Shop-bought

Per serve
176 cal
Protein 21.4g
Carbs 0.3g
Sat fat 2g

Faff factor: 1/10

Time cost: 20 mins

Purse damage: £10 (plus smoker, £33)

Worth it? Yes. Doing it yourself means you're saving half the salt. Store-bought hot-smoked packs can lose up to 50% of their folate, vitamin B6 and vitamin B12, through the cooking, cooling and packaging process. Plus, your home will smell like you've had a Norwegian huntsman living in it for the

Butter

I cannot stress enough the importance of using room temperature double cream (not single) and making sure the top of the butter maker (£14.99, chefn.com) is screwed on properly before you try this one. A ruined top, a stained wall and four attempts later, I did end up with something that looked like butter. It's pretty easy. Shake the maker with some buttermilk and 1 tsp honey to bump up your immune system, then drain through the strainer. Add a bit of water, shake and drain again and you'll end up with something that looks like butter, smells like butter and by God, tastes like butter. Expect to make enough to fill a ramekin that will last about two weeks. Pimp it with herbs, red peppercorns or garlic and everyone will be suitably impressed.

DIY

1 tbsp
101 kcal
Protein 0.1g
Carbs 0.0g
Fat 11.5g
Sat fat 7.3g



Shop-bought

1 tbsp
101 kcal
Protein 0.1g
Carbs 0.0g
Fat 11.5g
Sat fat 7.3g

Faff factor: 2/10 if you put the lid on properly before you shake (10/10 if not)

Time cost: Three mins, plus 40 mins in the fridge.

Purse damage: £1.20 (plus butter maker).

Worth it? Yes, depending on what milk you use. Spreads made from homogenised milk contribute to heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. So if you usually go for grass-fed butter made from buttermilk, the difference isn't massive. But, if you usually opt for something spreadable, then it is.



Thank you for smoking

Smoke your own salmon and you'll save half the salt

Oatcakes

Even the most dedicated of hemp-huggers would struggle to find the various pinhead, rolled and oatmeal porridge oats you need to make these anywhere convenient. Having to toast them in the oven before you can even get to the next step is enough to test anyone's patience, before the debacle of cutting the mixture into 5cm discs without it falling apart on its way to the tray. Sure, they tasted alright, but I'd sooner give my left hand than embark on the process post-work again. Nairns deserve a knighthood.

DIY

1 cake
179 cal
Protein 5.2g
Carbs 20.3g
Sat fat 5g



Shop-bought

1 cake
158 cal
Protein 4g
Carbs 21.4g
Sat fat 1.5g

Faff factor: 9/10

Time cost: 1 hour, 10 mins

Purse damage: £15. Although, the cost to your sanity will be higher.

Worth it? No. You can minimise the nutritional impact of buying ready-made oatcakes by checking the ingredient lists for partially hydrogenated oils, Nilsson says. Try Paterson's Oatcakes (£1.39, goodnessdirect.co.uk) – they have lower fat and carbs. Plus you won't end up crying, covered in oatcakes and swearing at a baking tray. **WIN**

DIY SOS

Make the most of your home-made food fails



Broken oatcakes:

If they don't bind or hold together in the oven – or even make it whole to the baking tray, just bake anyway, crumble up, sling in some seeds and dried fruit and use as granola the next morning.



Wheatgrass:

Grown wild? Just nip off the excess, juice it and freeze it in ice cube trays – that way it won't go to waste. When required, defrost overnight in the fridge, ready for the next morning.



Crushed nuts:

Okay, you can't snaffle pulped almonds at your desk, but you can whizz the pulp up with some olive oil, tahini, parsley and seasoning and you've got yourself one hell of a tasty almond hummus.