



**100**

Quick, Delicious,  
Home-Cooked  
Meals

the  
busy mom's  
**COOKBOOK**

**Antonia Lofaso**

*The*  
**BUSY MOM'S**  
**COOKBOOK**

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100 RECIPES FOR QUICK, DELICIOUS, HOME-COOKED MEALS

ANTONIA LOFASO

*with*  
CANDICE L. DAVIS

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The recipes contained in this book are to be followed exactly as written. The publisher is not responsible for your specific health or allergy needs that may require medical supervision. The publisher is not responsible for any adverse reactions to the recipes contained in this book.

To Xea, who makes the occasional craziness of the busy mom lifestyle worth every minute  
—as I pursue my passion, you're my greatest inspiration.

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And to all the other busy moms trying to balance it all—just remember none of us can  
pull this off alone. We're all in it together.

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# WELCOME TO THE BUSY MOM'S TABLE

Ever found yourself sprinting through the grocery store at seven o'clock in the morning, hoping you'll find something better than shrink-wrapped cheese and crackers to pack for lunch? When your son signs you up to make two dozen cookies for the school bake sale, do your thoughts immediately turn to slice and bake? Are you now, or have you ever been, on a first-name basis with every delivery dude from the local pizza place, and have you ever found yourself peeking out the window and hoping it's the hot guy this time?

Whether you're a single mom like me, a stay-at-home mom, a mom with a demanding job outside the house, or some combination of all of those, there's one thing we all have in common: we're busy. The recipes and tips in this book were designed to help bring the family together for meals, even as you juggle that busy lifestyle. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if your experience of family is a mom and her preschooler coloring pictures and telling knock-knock jokes while they eat or a rowdy gathering of parents and kids, aunties and uncles, grandparents and best friends fiercely debating which team will win the next big game. It's all family, and it's time to gather our families around the table again.

# FOOD AND FAMILY

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It could've been Rice-A-Roni with scrambled eggs, or a big dinner I helped my mom or my dad make. Either way, it was very important to my parents that we all sit together and share meals when I was growing up. They demonstrated to me how people learn about family and community through food. People bond over food. Good food makes people happy!

Growing up in a traditional Italian-American household meant I was always surrounded by food and family. The two were inseparable for us. Food was one of the ways we took care of one another and shared our love. And it was meant to be shared with everyone. If the cable guy came to the house, my dad would make him a sandwich. Cooking was a natural part of life and experimenting in the kitchen was one of my favorite ways to spend my free time.

I always knew I wanted to be a chef. I just wasn't sure it was a possibility for me. It seemed like the type of career people dream of but few actually ever succeed at—like becoming an actor or an artist. It wasn't until my daughter Xea's dad, Dwight, asked me what I really loved to do that I started to think it might be possible to make a living doing a job I enjoyed. As I look back, it seems crazy that I thought working and doing what you love didn't go together.

By the time I decided to go to culinary school, I was waiting tables and pregnant with Xea. It was a serious struggle, but with help from family, especially Xea's grandparents, I graduated from the French Culinary Institute in New York City. The most important lesson I learned during that period of my life is that the all-powerful supermom who does it all by herself is just a myth. We all need help, especially as we try to balance work and parenthood.

Right after graduation, I had the opportunity to work at Spago, back in Los Angeles. Although the pay was low and the hours were long, I jumped at the opportunity. Friends thought I was crazy, that I was wasting my time in the job, but I saw it as an opportunity to learn from some of the best in the restaurant business. I was making only seven dollars an hour, but I was gaining a wealth of experience. Early on, I figured out I'd have to be incredibly organized to balance the demanding job with raising Xea.

Seven years later, I secured my first position as executive chef. While I was planning the menu for the new restaurant, I was offered the opportunity to audition for *Top Chef: Chicago*. I had never thought of doing a television show, but when I made it through the audition process, I knew I had to commit 100 percent. Leaving Xea for an undetermined amount of time, knowing I'd be able to call home only once in a while, was incredibly hard, of course. Even though she was with her dad, I was used to being there to control and oversee all the details of her day, and letting go of that was a challenge.

But letting go was the only way I'd have a chance to succeed on the show. On previous seasons of *Top Chef*, I'd seen too many chefs crying about missing their kids, then getting eliminated in the same episode. I didn't want Xea to ever think that a few weeks apart would make or break our relationship. Instead, I wanted her to see her mom as focused and ambitious and great at what I do. I let that motivate me to make it to the finals.

Since I competed on *Top Chef*, so many new opportunities have opened up for me. The most amazing result of being on the show is that I now run into people all over the country who want to experience my cooking. They relate to my story and they've seen how passionate I am about food. It's such a privilege to have that kind of support; without the show, it would've taken years to build this kind of career.



With all its benefits, the demands of my profession have also meant asking my daughter to master some of the skills of self-sufficiency. While we have a tremendous network of family support, Xea has also stepped up to the challenge. Sometimes that means she packs her own lunch, makes the crepes for our breakfast, or accompanies me to work at a charity event. I may not be home for dinner, but we have breakfast together every day, and when I'm traveling, we rely on technology to keep in touch.

I'm not willing to sacrifice my career or my role as a mom, so I work hard to balance the two. I can't say it's always easy. It's a work in progress, and as our situation changes, we adjust. Xea recently lost her father, which has presented a whole new set of challenges. Fortunately, our mother-daughter relationship is strong and our lives continue to be filled with loving and supportive friends and family. If I can't be there to sit at the dinner table with her, I don't have to worry. She's always breaking bread with someone who loves her, even if it's not me.

*The Busy Mom's Cookbook* is about bringing people back to that family meal as a means of giving one another undivided attention. It's about giving parents a way to pass on their heritage to their children, the way my parents and grandparents did for me and I'm doing for my daughter. Many women (and men, too) are convinced they can't teach their kids about food because they're not professional chefs, they didn't learn to cook from their mothers, and they don't have hours to spend in the kitchen. It's not about formal training, and it's not about the quantity of time you spend sweating over the stove. It's about the quality of the relationship when you share the experience of making and eating real food with your kids.

# SEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT THE BUSY MOM

1. **We are, first and foremost, moms.** We meet with teachers, wipe runny noses, remind little ones that showering should actually be a daily occurrence, and occasionally show up for a meeting with peanut butter on our sleeve. It's who we are.
2. **We're more than just moms.** Our kids are top priority, but we still have our own careers, interests, passions, relationships, hobbies, pursuits, and dreams. While raising my daughter, Xea, I've completed culinary school, honed my craft under some of the most respected chefs in the business, competed twice on Bravo's *Top Chef*, and dedicated a year to planning and opening a new restaurant—with lots of help, of course!
3. **One parent plus one child equals a family.** A family is a family, whether it's two people or twelve. Single parents, two parents, blended families—it doesn't matter. Two people at the table are all you need for a family meal.
4. **There's no such thing as perfect balance in our lives.** It's a daily juggling act, and we get better at it by planning, organizing, and asking for help. The more we practice those skills, the easier it gets to keep all those balls marked career, kids, friends, family, and fun in the air. Still, we couldn't do it without help from our children's fathers, grandparents, and aunts and uncles, and from our friends, neighbors, and coworkers—anyone who's part of the team that helps us get things done and maintain sanity. We need the community we cobble together. It really does take a village!
5. **Sometimes, what we need is a kid-free moment.** We wouldn't be human if we didn't occasionally crave time alone or a few hours among adults. I say, eat at home more often, and use the money you would've spent dining out for a trip to the spa!
6. **We get tired.** Duh! We're taking on a lot, and even with help, it would be crazy to think we don't get worn out sometimes.
7. **Even when we get tired, we get up and keep going.** Wouldn't it be nice to spend the day in bed with a bucket of ice cream, or a tub of cookie dough, and the remote control? Let somebody else make breakfast, mop the kitchen floor, and type up that overdue book report. Uh, not gonna happen.

Those are simple truths about being a modern mother. It doesn't matter if you're a stay-at-home mom, a working single mom, or a mother and wife and small-business owner. We're always balancing our needs with those of the people we love most in the world. Read on for seven rules that can help make home-cooked, family-centered meals a valuable part of that equation.

# SEVEN RULES FOR THE BUSY MOM'S KITCHEN

1. **Start off small.** If you cook only on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and your culinary contribution usually consists of opening a can of biscuits, don't wake up the day after you get *The Busy Mom's Cookbook* and try to commit to a month of homemade meals. After a week or so of trying a new dish each day, you'd be ready to practice everything you learned in your kickboxing class on the next person who asked you what you're making for dinner. Start off with one extra home-cooked meal the first week. Next week, plan for two more than you'd usually make, and build from there. It gets easier with practice. Seriously.
2. **Speaking of planning...plan your menu a week or two ahead of time.** If you waited until the day of your daughter's soccer game to figure out how she'd get there, you'd probably end up with an unhappy kid on your hands, plus more chaos than necessary. Planning your schedule in advance makes life easier, gives kids a sense of stability, and preserves your sanity. So does planning meals. *The Busy Mom's Cookbook* will give you some ideas to make it easier to step back, take a deep breath, and plan it all out.
3. **Expect plans to change.** Kids get sick. Bosses ask us to stay at work an extra hour. Babysitters cancel at the last minute. It happens to the best of us. Be flexible, and roll with it.
4. **Sometimes you just have to serve the kids hot dogs, Stouffer's French bread pizza, or frozen waffles.** I do! I grew up eating that stuff once in a while, and I like it once in a while. You don't have to choose between feeding your kids and having a life. You're teaching your kids healthy living habits—everything in moderation.
5. **Let the kids in the kitchen—girls and boys.** Instead of wasting time and energy chasing them out, let them come in and peel a carrot or two. They'll feel like they've accomplished something, and they'll have learned new skills, which means they can help you more as they grow. The best part: you get to spend a few minutes talking with them without once saying do your homework, make your bed, or quit hitting your sister. Don't worry. There'll be plenty of time to nag later.
6. **Use the 15/15 Rule.** When there just doesn't seem to be enough time, spend fifteen minutes in the kitchen preparing a meal with your child and spend fifteen more seated at the table, sharing your meal. Take the time to look into his eyes, and ask him about his day. Get as much quality as you can out of it. Homework, the laundry, e-mail, and the season finale of whatever you're recording can wait for thirty minutes.
7. **Enjoy!** It's just food. I wrote this book to make life easier, not more complicated. I've included the full range of recipes—from fast and healthy meals both you and the kids will enjoy to slightly more involved, special recipes you can make for special occasions. They're recipes for real moms with real lives. No pressure.

I want *The Busy Mom's Cookbook* to be an inspiration to you, a busy, multitasking mom—a reminder to enjoy this part of family life. Big or small, every family deserves the sense of community that happens only when people break bread together. Many of our most intimate moments happen at the table. People get engaged and break up at the table. They announce promotions and straight-A report cards and celebrate every accomplishment over a shared meal. I hope this cookbook will remind you to slow down and enjoy one another. Experience a great meal with your child and create the kind of

memories that happen only when you nourish each other with both fresh food and companionship. If your days are as busy as mine, trust me, your "to do" list will still be there.

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# THE BUSY MOM'S BASICS

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When I moved away from home to go to college, I lived in a small apartment in New York City. It was my first place. I slept there and studied there, but I called my mom to complain that it just didn't feel like a home. She told me to go to the store and get some flour, sugar, and all the other baking essentials, along with a couple of boxes of pasta, some olive oil, and a few other things.

Once my kitchen was stocked, and I could jump in there and make myself a home-cooked meal, my apartment began to feel like home to me.

Here are some basics I suggest every mom have on hand to make quick meals and keep her house feeling like home.

## **Baking Supplies/Spices**

all-purpose flour

baking powder

baking soda

Better Than Bouillon

black pepper

Cajun seasoning (any brand)

cinnamon

dried bread crumbs/panko

ground coriander

ground cumin

honey

dried Italian seasoning

lemon-pepper seasoning

light brown sugar

nutmeg

powdered sugar

salt

sugar

vanilla extract

## **Condiments**

barbecue sauce

catsup

hot sauce

mayonnaise

oyster sauce

soy sauce

whole-grain and other mustards

Worcestershire sauce

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### **Dairy and Eggs**

block of Parmigiano-Reggiano

eggs

unsalted butter

whole milk

### **Oil and Vinegar**

apple cider vinegar

balsamic vinegar

extra-virgin olive oil (for flavoring)

inexpensive olive oil (for cooking)

sherry vinegar

vegetable or canola oil

### **Pantry Staples**

brown rice

canned beans

canned coconut milk, unsweetened

canned corn

canned crabmeat

canned kalamata olives

canned peaches

canned pineapple

canned tomatoes

canned tuna

capers

dried beans

parboiled rice

pasta (a few boxes)

premade tomato sauce

seasoned rice

### **Produce and Bread**

bell peppers

butter lettuce

carrots

celery

fresh tomatoes

garlic

good-quality bread

lemons

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limes

poultry mix of fresh herbs (rosemary, thyme, parsley, and oregano)

red and yellow onions

romaine lettuce

# Breakfast and Brunch

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LEMON CREPES

CREAMY POLENTA WITH MACERATED STONE FRUIT

FRESH STRAWBERRY-AND-MINT LIMEADE

OPEN-FACE BLT WITH EGGS ON THE SUNNY SIDE

CRISPY OLIVE OIL PANCAKES

RED BLISS POTATO AND SWEET ONION FRITTATA

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS WITH HONEY BUTTER

CAJUN COUNTRY POTATOES AND SAUSAGES

CRAB CAKES WITH CHIPOTLE ADOBO AIOLI

THE BEST BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

SMOKED SALMON WITH CRISPY POTATO PANCAKE

CUSTOMIZED MINI-FRITTATAS

CUCUMBER-WATERMELON SPRITZER WITH CHAMOMILE



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**T**HE FIRST TIME I EVER MADE BREAKFAST, I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD AND I THOUGHT it would be good to start with eggs. That's what my dad made us every day. So, on the one morning he overslept, I decided to handle it for him. My little brother sat in a corner of the kitchen playing with his Legos while I did the things I'd seen my dad do: crack the eggs, put them in the pan, throw the shells in the trash, and clean up.

My poor dad woke up in a panic, realizing he was late and thinking his kids must be starving. I kept trying to explain to him that I'd already started breakfast, but he was too busy searching for the egg pan to pay any attention to what the four-year-old was saying.

Finally I convinced him to check the oven. There he found the egg pan with three perfectly cracked and perfectly raw eggs sitting in it. I hadn't yet figured out that the oven actually had to be turned on. Oops.

My dad tells this little story all the time. He loves to brag that even as a small child, I kept a clean kitchen while I cooked, and I still do. I just love that we have this memory to share. It's one of hundreds of small moments that connect us.

Now that I have years of experience cooking for my own daughter, I've perfected some breakfast favorites. The recipes in this chapter will take you from busy workday mornings, when you're scrambling to get the kids out the door, to leisurely brunches when you can invite the kids to enjoy cooking with you and make your own kitchen memories.

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# Lemon Crepes

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**This recipe is so simple that my eleven-year-old daughter makes it without my help. One day, she decided the powdered sugar and lemon juice should be blended together in a bowl and served like an icing. Feel free to steal her idea.**

*1¼ cups whole milk*  
*4 medium or 3 large eggs*  
*1¼ teaspoons vanilla extract*  
*1¼ cups all-purpose flour*  
*¼ teaspoon cinnamon*  
*2 tablespoons sugar*  
*¼ teaspoon salt*  
*Nonstick vegetable oil spray, for pan*  
*1 cup powdered sugar*  
*3 lemons, quartered*

**MAKES 12 crepes**  
**TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes**

## WHAT TO DO

**IN A BLENDER COMBINE** the milk, eggs, and vanilla. Add the flour, cinnamon, sugar, and salt on top of the liquid ingredients. Blend for 25 to 30 seconds on high, just until incorporated. Be sure to add the wet ingredients to the blender first. If the dry ingredients go in first, the liquid won't reach the bottom and the flour will get caked under the blades.

**SPRAY** an 8-inch nonstick pan with nonstick spray and heat on medium. For each crepe, pour ¼ cup of batter in a very thin layer on the bottom of the pan. Cook for about 1½ minutes. The wetness will dissipate and the crepe will look like a very soft pancake.

**FOLD** the crepe in half to make a semicircle. Fold it in half again, so it's folded in fourths, forming a cone shape with one rounded end, and transfer it to a plate.

**DUST** the crepes generously with powdered sugar. Serve with a lemon quarter for each crepe. The lemons will be squeezed on top of each crepe and create a lemony icing as the juice mixes with the powdered sugar.

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# *Creamy Polenta with Macerated Stone Fruit*

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Maybe you've never thought of polenta as an option for breakfast, but this simple, warm dish makes a great replacement for the same old oatmeal or cold cereal. And kids love the sweetness of the fruit topping.

## FOR THE POLENTA

*8 cups whole milk*

*2 cups quick-cooking polenta*

## FOR THE FRUIT TOPPING

*2 peaches, plums, or nectarines, pitted and sliced*

*¼ cup light brown sugar, firmly packed*

*¼ teaspoon salt*

*¼ teaspoon cinnamon, or 4 Microplane grates of a fresh cinnamon stick*

*¼ teaspoon nutmeg, or 4 Microplane grates of fresh nutmeg*

*Juice of one lemon*

SERVES 4  
TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes



**If you can't find quick-cooking polenta, follow the package directions on whatever polenta your store has, but substitute whole milk for the water.**

## WHAT TO DO

IN A 4-QUART SAUCEPOT, heat the milk over medium heat until it reaches a simmer. Whisk in the polenta. It should be simmering, not boiling. Look for movement in the liquid and polenta, but if it's popping, reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook for 10 minutes, whisking every 2 minutes, and whisking again as it finishes cooking.

WHILE THE POLENTA COOKS, place the stone fruit in a medium bowl and toss it with the brown sugar, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and lemon juice. The brown sugar and salt will draw out the natural juices of the fruit, which will blend with the sugar to create a flavorful macerated fruit topping.

SERVE the polenta in four bowls, topping each with a spoonful of the fruit.

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# ***Fresh Strawberry-and-Mint Limeade***

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**Don't forget that drinks offer another opportunity to be creative in the kitchen. This is a nice alternative to the usual lemonade and a fabulous alternative to soda, too. Your kids will love it.**

*4 cups water*

*Juice of 4 medium limes*

*2 cups strawberries, stemmed and juiced or muddled (see [tip](#))*

*1 cup agave nectar*

*4 sprigs of mint, for garnish*

*8 berries, for garnish*

**SERVES 4**  
**TOTAL TIME: 5 minutes**



**You'll get more juice from the strawberries if you juice them, but if you don't have a juicer, you can muddle them. Simply add them to the bottom of your pitcher and crush them with a spoon.**

## **WHAT TO DO**

**COMBINE** the water, lime juice, strawberry juice, and agave nectar in a large pitcher and stir well. Serve over ice in four glasses and garnish with fresh mint and berries.

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# Open-Face BLT with Eggs on the Sunny Side

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This fork-and-knife sandwich goes great with a brunch Bloody Mary, or with the more kid-friendly Fresh Strawberry and Mint Limeade ([page 14](#)) or Cucumber-Watermelon Spritzer ([page 32](#)). I like your basic Oscar Mayer bacon, but you can also substitute turkey bacon, a speciality uncured bacon, or a vegetarian option, if you prefer. (*see photo insert*)

## FOR THE SANDWICHES

1 pound bacon  
2 (6-inch) baguettes, sliced lengthwise  
4 large leaves butter lettuce (also known as Boston lettuce)  
2 medium tomatoes, sliced  
Salt to taste  
Black pepper to taste  
Nonstick vegetable oil spray or 2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
4 large eggs

## FOR THE TARRAGON MAYONNAISE

¼ cup mayonnaise  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon (*see tip*) or 1½ teaspoons dried Italian seasoning (*see tip*, [page 47](#))  
Juice of ½ lemon

SERVES 4  
TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes



**For the tarragon mayonnaise, you could also substitute 1½ tea-spoons dried tarragon for the fresh tarragon if you happen to have it on hand. Or you could swap the tarragon for another fresh herb.**

## WHAT TO DO

COOK the bacon according to the package directions.

WHILE THE BACON IS COOKING, combine the mayonnaise, the tarragon, and the lemon juice in a small bowl and blend well.

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SET THE BROILER to high and toast the baguette halves in the oven until they're slightly brown. It should take only about a minute.

SPREAD the tarragon mayonnaise on the toasted baguettes. Layer on the butter lettuce and tomato. Season the tomato with salt and pepper. Place the bacon on top.

SPRAY a 10-inch nonstick pan with nonstick vegetable oil spray, or melt 1 tablespoon of butter for each batch of eggs, and heat the pan on medium-low. You can make 2 sunny-side-up eggs at a time. Crack the eggs into the pan, keeping the heat low so the eggs don't brown. Cook the eggs for 3 to 5 minutes or until both the yolks and the whites thicken and set. Layer 1 egg onto each sandwich and serve warm.

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# Crispy Olive Oil Pancakes

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Sunday-morning pancakes are my dad's specialty. This version is an homage to him and to his Italian heritage. Using olive oil instead of butter gives you a pancake that's crispier on the outside and still tender on the inside. If you're in the mood for something sweeter, try the chocolate pancake option.

*2 cups all-purpose flour*

*½ cup sugar*

*2 tablespoons baking powder*

*1 teaspoon salt*

*Zest of 1 orange, finely chopped (optional)*

*1 cup buttermilk*

*2 cups whole milk*

*2 large eggs*

*4 teaspoons vanilla extract*

*2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for cooking*

*Blackberries and Devon cream, mascarpone cheese, or syrup, for serving (optional)*

**MAKES 12 pancakes**  
**TOTAL TIME: 20 minutes**



**A 24-inch griddle that covers two burners is great for larger families. They're not expensive and you can cook eight to ten pancakes at a time.**

**I used to keep the pancakes warm in the oven until the whole batch was done, but my dad insists they should be eaten hot from the pan. The larger griddle lets the whole family sit down to breakfast together.**

## WHAT TO DO

IN A MEDIUM BOWL, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and zest, if using.

IN A SEPARATE BOWL, combine the buttermilk, milk, eggs, vanilla, and 2 tablespoons olive oil. Whisk



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