

The Zest Podcast - S6E10

[00:00:00] **Carly Paige:** I started changing what was on my plate. And as I made those changes, I noticed how much better I felt on the inside and how that translated to how I looked on the outside.

[00:00:12] **Dalia Colón:** I'm Dalia Colón and this is The Zest. Citrus, Seafood, Spanish Flavor, and Southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. Healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated. Today, we'll learn to simplify healthy eating with Orlando chef and cookbook author, Carly Paige.

[00:00:38] Healthy eating can mean different things to different people. But in general, if you're looking to eat more plants and less of the white stuff, less sugar, less dairy, then this conversation with Carly Paige is for you. Carly is an Orlando based chef, social media influencer at FitLiving Eats and author of the cookbook, *Simply Swapped Everyday*. She explains the motivation for changing her own diet and easy ways that we can all start to eat and feel a little better.

[00:01:13] **Carly Paige:** Today there's so many diets and lifestyles and conflicting information out there that it can be really hard to navigate when you are just looking to feel better.

[00:01:26] And you don't know where to. I think, you know, my goal is really just to simplify it for people. And in my own journey, you know, I had one way of thinking of, uh, what healthy meant, and then started making gradual changes and realized how much better I felt when I did make those changes. And it's a totally different way of looking at food and flavors than what I was used to growing up.

[00:01:54] And I think what a lot of people aren't familiar with in the traditional American diet.

[00:02:00] **Dalia Colón:** Tell me more about your own health journey. What were you used to eating, growing up and what sort of changes did you make.

[00:02:07] So growing

[00:02:08] **Carly Paige:** up, my mom did a really good job of making sure that dinner was always on the table.

[00:02:14] You know, I have so many memories sitting around the table with my family, talking about our day, enjoying a dinner that my mom had prepared. That said, those dinners were usually like chicken and cream of mushroom soup and, uh, homemade pizza with the Pillsbury biscuit dough as the crust . So it was delicious.

[00:02:39] Uh, but it wasn't necessarily nutritious, but I didn't recognize the difference then. I just thought that if it was home cooked and put on the table, then it must be good for you. And then along with that, you know, as I was getting older and more interested in nutrition, I think that we often find ourselves in the rut of envisioning a plate as if there's a piece of protein, a whole grain and a vegetable, and that can get kind of boring and monotonous over time. So I have a history of really bad anxiety and acne. So, um, I had been struggling with acne since middle school, anxiety since elementary school. And as I grew up, I felt like a lot of the solutions now looking back were really just a bandaid to cover up the issue at hand.

[00:03:39] We really weren't getting to that root cause. And so as I became an adult and was exposed to different foods and way of eating that are a little bit more health focused and nutritious, I started changing what was on my plate. And as I made those changes, I noticed how much better I felt on the inside and how that translated to how I looked on the outside. Not just in my skin clearing, but in the overall confide that I had and moving throughout my day. And then, because I was making those changes on my plate. It also led to awareness in other areas of my life as well, which really impacted my anxiety level. So it was kind of like changing my diet was the catapult that created this ripple effect of more awareness around my lifestyle choices as a.

[00:04:38] **Dalia Colón:** Well, your skin is flawless. I'm super jealous.

[00:04:41] **Carly Paige:** Oh, thank you.

[00:04:42] **Dalia Colón:** Tell me, I, I always love hearing what people eat. So take me through maybe yesterday or a recent day and just what you would eat in a day. No more cream of mushroom soup I'm guessing?

[00:04:52] **Carly Paige:** No more cream of mushroom soup. However, that said, um, I had a group cooking class last night and we were talking about food and a lot of the recipes that I share are plant-based.

[00:05:04] Vegan friendly. And I do that because going back to the changes that I started making in my diet, it was really moving towards more of a plant based

diet and lifestyle. Using things like cashew cream and nutritional yeast. And so a lot of times people assume that I am vegan and I, I personally am not, I don't believe you have to be vegan in order to reap the health benefit.

[00:05:31] Plant-based foods and, you know, everyone is unique in their dietary needs and what makes them feel good. But that said, we were talking about, you know, they were asking me if I was vegan. And I said, actually I eat everything and anything. Just certain things makes me feel better than some foods. And so I try to eat those things more often.

[00:05:55] And my team calls me the garbage disposal. So they know that I can, they can throw anything at me and I will probably eat it. So what I eat in a day, it kind of varies of what I have on hand, readily available to me. Whether I made it or it was leftover from the kitchen, or I put in an heirloom order and I have meals on hand, but like for example, I have next to me, it doesn't look super great right now but, made a smoothie.

[00:06:27] **Dalia Colón:** It does look great. It's like a bright green smoothie. What's in it?

[00:06:30] **Carly Paige:** I always add leafy greens to my smoothie. So usually I like to keep, uh, just a box of fresh spinach on hand, and then I'll add whatever fruit I have in the freezer. Today it happened to be peaches and cherries, and then I'll add a vanilla protein powder to that.

[00:06:49] Some almond milk. And, uh, a little bit of healthy fat. So usually it'll be some avocado or today it was a spoon full of almond butter. And then I have a, a green powder that I'll add sometimes if I'm feeling I need a little extra boost. And that's it. Like it doesn't have to be super complicated. It doesn't need to be filled with tons of super food.

[00:07:13] I try to incorporate a smoothie into my day, somehow, either for breakfast or a quick lunch. If I don't have a smoothie for breakfast, I'll usually have like scrambled eggs with some veggies, avocado, and a piece of sprouted grain bread. Lunch is usually something a little bit lighter, like some kind of salad that has fish or I'll make like tuna fish or piece of chicken or something like that on it. And then, dinner is just kind of, uh, whatever I got. So last night I had a cooking class and so I didn't eat until later. Thankfully there were some leftovers from class. So, um, it was actually a much nicer dinner than I probably would've put together myself.

[00:08:01] It was mental Walnut tacos with a pineapple mango salsa. And these almond flour tortillas and then a cilantro lime cauliflower, brown rice. That recipe, the taco recipe is actually on my website. If you wanna check it out.

[00:08:17] **Dalia Colón:** Uh, I definitely do. My mouth is watering. That sounds amazing. And I love it because it's something that's familiar to a lot of us, which is tacos. And then I am a vegetarian. So I know my way around a bag of lentils, but maybe some people have never had a lentil taco. So it's something that's familiar to us, which is tacos, but then some of the ingredients like the lentils and the walnuts might be a little bit different.

[00:08:40] Okay. I've got your cookbook here, simply swapped every day, which is just beautiful. And it's full of these sort of food swaps. So you gave the example of the lentil tacos. What are some other easy swaps that we could make?

[00:08:56] **Carly Paige:** So a big one that you can make is if you like to bake, there's a lot of healthier ingredients that you can use to make them a little bit more, um, decadent.

[00:09:07] They're still decadent, but just a little bit more nutritious. So I'm a huge fan of kind of thinking about these swaps or healthier ingredients as things that we can add to our plate, add to our recipes, instead of taking away. I feel like that's something with healthy eating that it's a track that we fall into of thinking like, oh my gosh, if we wanna be healthy, we have to deprive ourselves of something.

[00:09:34] And it's very much a diet kind of mentality and it doesn't have to be that way. So with baking, one of my favorite swaps is using coconut sugar instead of white or brown sugar. So coconut sugar is low glycemic. It's not going to spike your blood sugar levels like traditional sugar wood, but it still lends that sweetness to recipes.

[00:09:58] And it's a one to one replacement. So, uh, one cup of white sugar can be replaced with one cup of coconut sugar. Probably the more tricky swap, but, uh, kind of fun to play with are these different flours that are more readily available at the grocery stores. So a lot of times when I'm baking, I'll use a combination of almond flours and oat flours, instead of all purpose flour. All purpose flour is heavily processed. There's really no nutrient left in the flour that we're putting into, say, our muffins. So adding something like almond flour and oat flour is a good way to boost the overall nutritional quality of that baked

good. You're getting healthy fat and protein with the almond flour, and then you're getting a great source of whole grained and fiber from that oat flour.

[00:10:53] But, you know, something tricky with the flowers is it's not necessarily a one to one replacement. So almonds don't have any way to really soak up that moisture that you're going to get in your recipe. That's why you have to kind of balance it with the oat flour. If you only used oat flour, it would be very dense.

[00:11:14] So that almond flour helps lighten up your baked goods. So it takes a little bit of trial and error and experimentation, but that's kind of part of the fun of cooking, right?

[00:11:26] **Dalia Colón:** It is. And I'm, I'm happy to hear you say that it takes experimentation because I certainly have tried to bake with almond flour and other flowers and it comes out chalky and very dense.

[00:11:38] And I think, oh, this just isn't for me, it tastes like a brick who wants to eat that. But to hear you say that this is part of the process is encouraging. Yes. Um, how, how about one more? Do you have one more swap for us? These are great.

[00:11:50] Another

[00:11:50] **Carly Paige:** one that I love is a swap for cheese or creamy things. So traditionally, we're going to get that creamy consistency from either cheese, mounted cheese or heavy cream.

[00:12:06] So instead of that, we can use things like almond milk or my favorite cashew cream. It's just blended up cashews with water that you can make either savory with some nutritional yeast that gives it that cheesy, like, flavor. And maybe some garlic powder, salt and pepper, or you can make it sweet and add a little bit of maple syrup, some vanilla cinnamon, and you're getting a healthier source of fat from the cashew than you would from the half and half or the heavy cream or that melted cheese. And nutritional yeast is kind of like my secret ingredient in the kitchen. I use it on anything and everything savory. It's so good. It has that nutty cheesy flavor to it. And it's really nutritious. So one tablespoon of nutritional yeast has five grams of protein and over a hundred percent of your daily vitamin Bs, which is really good for boosting energy.

[00:13:09] So that's a great example of how you can add something to your plate and boost the nutritional quality without feeling like you're having to take

something away or eat that much more food in order to hit your daily quota of nutrients.

[00:13:25] **Dalia Colón:** These are great. And nutritional yeast really makes things taste like cheese.

[00:13:30] I don't like a lot of those fake cheeses. But this to me tastes better and I've served it to carnivores and everybody loves anything made with nutritional yeast. So that's great. Okay. We're in Florida. It's hot. I wanna talk, I wanna get into some of your, no cook recipes. Um, you took us through what you eat in a day, which is, you know, quite a bit of no cook food, any general tips or suggestions for eating when it's hot outside?

[00:13:58] **Carly Paige:** Yes, absolutely. By the way, when I was going through what I eat in a day, I like to add that, uh, it sounded very healthy and I just wanna put a disclaimer out there that is not always the case. In my day yesterday for lunch, I needed something super quick and didn't have anything on hand prepared. So I had a box of Annie's White Cheddar Mac and Cheese, and I, I whipped that up, put some green peas in there so that there's a little bit of edgy to make me feel a little bit better about it.

[00:14:30] But even, you know, even myself who I proclaim healthy food, I love little indulgences, which is important to make it feel like you enjoy food and you can indulge every now and then.

[00:14:44] **Dalia Colón:** That makes us feel better.

[00:14:47] **Carly Paige:** So, uh, so some heat friendly, no baked recipes, probably one of my favorite go-to items are mason jar salads.

[00:14:58] You can make them ahead of time. They're really easy to make. You can use anything that you have on hand, and they're great to just store in the refrigerator and take on the go. If you work in an office setting or you're running to a meeting, um, and the key is really in how you build your jar. So the dressing is always going to be on the bottom and then anything that can marinate in liquid for a couple days, like beans or herder, vegetable like carrots or something that you don't want to brown, like apples and then build from heavy to light. So whatever you like in your salad, any of those toppings, you can kind of build as you work your way up. And then at the very top, you'll add your leafy green. Spinach, lettuce, romaine, whatever it is that you like. You'll add on top. That way, the lettuce is never touching a dressing and that's what keeps it fresh for up to four days in your refrigerator.

[00:16:02] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, that's very important. Cause nobody, nobody likes a soggy salad. As far as the dressing, are you making your own or do you have a favorite store bought dressing?

[00:16:13] **Carly Paige:** Usually I make my own because I just make them really simple. It's usually a one to one ratio of either avocado oil or extra Virgin olive oil and then some kind of vinegar. So I'll switch it up with balsamic vinegar, apple cider vine, red wine vinegar. And then I'll add some lemon juice, a little bit of dijon mustard.

[00:16:38] You could also use like a little bit of yogurt. And the reason I do that is because it helps emulsify and mix together that oil and vinegar so that it doesn't separate and just makes it a little bit creamy. And then, um, a little bit of salt and pepper and that's it. So it's really simple to make your own dressing. That said sometimes I like to switch it up and give my salad a little bit more flavor.

[00:17:05] And I always like to try new things in the grocery store too. So tessemae dressing and primal kitchen are two of my go to brands for store bought dressing.

[00:17:18] **Dalia Colón:** Okay. I will look for those. What about the people who are tired of eating salad?

[00:17:25] **Carly Paige:** Uh, that's okay. I totally understand that. From other, no bake recipes, so you can make like a noodle salad, a cold noodle salad. Um, there's a recipe, I think it's on my website, definitely available through heirloom, it's a Thai almond noodle salad. So it's just buck wheat. So be noodles with chilled veggies, edamame, cucumber, carrots, and then a really yummy Thai almond creamy dressing.

[00:17:58] So that's a really good one as well. If you're looking for something a little bit more filling, but not looking to have to heat up your food and the oven.

[00:18:09] **Dalia Colón:** That sounds so good. And just to look forward to having that for dinner one night, or, you know, lunch in the middle of the day, like, like what a treat that would be. It's fun to actually know that you have something good. waiting for you to eat.

[00:18:23] **Carly Paige:** Absolutely.

[00:18:24] **Dalia Colón:** So I wanted to ask you a little bit more about yourself as we start to wrap up. Did you grow up in Florida? And I'm curious, uh, why Florida is such a great place to eat healthy and feel good?

[00:18:37] **Carly Paige:** Yeah. Uh, I am from Orlando, born and raised, and then I went to college in Palm Beach.

[00:18:44] So I have never left the Sunshine State other than to go to culinary school in LA, which is my Sunshine State number two. You know, I have always known Florida to be my home. I really value family. I have a pretty small family, so, and we're all really close. My parents live in Orlando, my brother and sister-in-law live in Orlando.

[00:19:10] So I love that feeling of being close to family. And so I've just never really considered living anywhere else. And now I have a business that's rooted here and a network, and I also don't love cold weather. I get cold very easily. So every summer in Orlando come like June, I'm questioning why I live here because it is so hot and so humid and miserable, but I think I would take it over being bone chilled in the snow, having to deal with ice. You know, I think because it does get so hot here,

[00:19:50] we crave those lighter foods. So we crave things like smoothies. We crave things like salads or the chilled, uh, soba noodle bowls. So it's, in a way, our environment sets us up for a little bit of healthier eating because we're looking for lighter, brighter brush flavors.

[00:20:12] **Dalia Colón:** 100% agree and needing cold food to eat, I would say is a good problem to have. You have so many fun recipes on your website, raw lemon raspberry cheesecake bars, zesty lemon energy bites.

[00:20:25] I just, I love it all. Is there anything else that you wanna add?

[00:20:29] **Carly Paige:** I think really just, you know, reminding people that healthy doesn't have to be hard and it can taste delicious and it doesn't need to be complicated. Be intuitive into what feels right for you and just focus on one thing. One thing that you can change tomorrow, one thing that you can improve upon.

[00:20:50] And like you said, you know, it's really nice having healthy food made for you or prepared in your fridge to grab. I think that planning is so key. To an overall healthy lifestyle, because then we can kind of take away that decision making process when we're feeling pressed for time and energy. So if

we plan ahead and kind of have things prepared, in the refrigerator or even just thought out, then it alleviates that frantic mode that we can get into when we start to get really hungry and we don't have anything, but there's no good takeout option.

[00:21:32] So what do we do? And then we spend 30, \$40 on an Uber eats meal. And so I think just planning ahead as much as you can and pre-thinking out your decisions can really support you in an overall healthy lifestyle.

[00:21:50] **Dalia Colón:** Well, Carly, thank you so much for all the inspiration. I'm seriously. I could just spend a month making all the recipes in your cookbook and on your website and I would be eating like a queen.

[00:22:00] So thank you so much.

[00:22:01] **Carly Paige:** You're welcome. Happy to be here.

[00:22:06] **Dalia Colón:** That was Orlando- based chef Carly Paige. Her cookbook is *Simply Swapped Everyday* and you can follow Carly on all the socials @fitlivingeats. She's got some really fresh, flavorful, plant based recipes on her website and social media. I've made a few of them and they all turned out really well.

[00:22:26] So I think you'll like them. She gave us a few to share on our website. They are raw pad Thai mason jar salad with kelp noodles, antipasto Italian mason jar salad, zesty lemon energy bites to power you through the day. You know, we love that one. And raw lemon raspberry cheesecake bars. Mm, you can find all four of these recipes on our website, thezestpodcast.com.

[00:22:55] I'm Dalia Colon. I produce the zest with Andrew Lucas. We get help from Chandler Balkcom, Hana Abdel Magid, and Mark Haze. The Zest is a production of WUSF Public Media. Copyright 2022.