

# The Zest Podcast - S7E2

[00:00:00] **Wendy Wesley:** They didn't realize how much of their income was going to feed themselves from restaurant and takeout food until they really sat down and they did the math and they said, we are staring at our trip to Paris. We're staring at it right here. And so they cooked more at home. They lost some weight. They took a fantastic trip.

[00:00:19] **Dalia Colón:** I'm Dalia Colon and this is The Zest. Citrus, Seafood, Spanish flavor, and Southern Charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. January is a great time to tweak our habits, so if you find yourself relying on restaurant food and takeout more than you'd like to consider this your reset.

[00:00:44] Restaurant food is amazing, of course, but it can also be pricey in more ways than one. When we rely too much on restaurants, our wallets and our waistlines can take a hit. But help is here. Wendy Wesley is a Regis. Licensed dietician and nutritionist based in St. Petersburg. She always brings practical advice to the pod, and today she offers tips to help us get back to cooking and eating at home.

[00:01:13] Whether you wanna save money or improve your health, I think you'll find her tip. Very doable. That's why we love her. And if you're in the Tampa Bay area, you might also wanna try one of Wendy's in-person cooking classes. Just go to [wendywesleynutrition.com](http://wendywesleynutrition.com) and click on Cooking with Friends. Now, here's my conversation with Wendy.

[00:01:37] **Wendy Wesley:** Clients are coming to me, many of them on repeat, who are eating out in restaurants or doing take 8 to 12 times per week, and they have a sinking feeling that it is having an effect on their health, and I concur.

[00:01:56] **Dalia Colón:** I would say so. Okay. My family eats out usually once a week when my son has basketball on Wednesday nights, just because the timing of school pickup and basketball, and if we go beyond that, I'm like riddled with guilt.

[00:02:10] I feel like I'm blowing my budget. It's probably not the healthiest thing. What would you say are the biggest problems with that?

[00:02:18] **Wendy Wesley:** I think, and this is just my hypothesis, that um, during the pandemic, people turned to food for entertainment. Movies, concerts,

travel, get-togethers, festivals. It was gone. And I think after a hard day of working at home and stress of everybody under one roof, people turn to prepared foods for entertainment.

[00:02:43] A lot of people downloaded apps on their phones for meal delivery services that they didn't have before the pandemic. As we're coming out of the pandemic, these new ways of eating have become the new way. They've become hardwired and the habits are really hard to break. ,

[00:03:01] **Dalia Colón:** I could see that. Because if you're getting takeout or eating in a restaurant, that means you're not grocery shopping.

[00:03:06] So even if you did wanna prepare something at home, you don't have any food. So the first step is now I have to go to the grocery store and I don't have time for that.

[00:03:13] **Wendy Wesley:** Yeah. And I think too, that going to the grocery store and then doing more work in the home was very unal. Some people got a taste of restaurant food that maybe they hadn't had before.

[00:03:26] Different kinds of restaurant food from different chains, different varieties, and I think they got a taste for it, and restaurant food became the reward. for staying locked in and I to my clients, I always try and break down and explain how restaurant food is very different from home cooking. One is not better than the other as far as it's quality or it's taste.

[00:03:54] It's just different. And it's challenging for the home cook to mimic what is done in restaurant.

[00:04:00] **Dalia Colón:** It really is. When you say they got a taste for restaurant food, I get it. Because I could try to replicate a dish that I've had at a restaurant, but theirs is gonna taste better and I don't have to wash the dishes if I get theirs.

[00:04:13] **Wendy Wesley:** Exactly. And I have an example, and I won't name the chain, but it's a fast casual Asian chain. I read about how they prepare this one very popular dish. The chicken is brine and then deep fried in the factory in Chicago. It is then shipped out to the different stores, and then once it hits the stores, it is again fried, and then it is coated in a sauce that contains seven different kinds of.

[00:04:42] **Dalia Colón:** Mm. So obviously so that we wouldn't do that ourself.

[00:04:44] **Wendy Wesley:** That's the kind of thing that is really that kind of technology and that kind of time. And I also say that kind of hand because when you're cooking for yourself at home, your hand knows better than to not brine deep fry twice and coat in seven kinds of sugar, a food that you're going to eat for yourself.

[00:05:03] You just know better. But when it's done out of sight, out of mind, and it comes to your front door, Delicious, hot, ready to eat. This is something that can be very, very habit forming and a lot of my clients have come to this place where they don't remember how they used to eat because this has become the new way, and they want me to help them unwind this behavior.

[00:05:27] **Dalia Colón:** Yeah, it could definitely become a habit, especially if you pair it with something like binge watching a show, which a lot of us also did during the pandemic. Yes. Yeah. Yes. And your hand, you mentioned your hand being different at home, your hand would never include so much salt, fat, sugar that they're using to make it taste.

[00:05:45] Oh. But it does taste so good. Okay. Wendy, help us get out of this trap. I, I hear you have, is it seven tips?

[00:05:52] **Wendy Wesley:** I do, I I have seven tips. Well, one of them is, um, I like to set or help people set what I call ridiculously achievable goals, cuz my clients will say, okay, so five times this week I'm going to cook at home.

[00:06:06] And I say, you will do no such thing. Let's do one time this week. and they kind of, they kinda say, oh, it's kinda not as, as successful as I really wanted to be. And uh, I say, this is long game. And so what we're gonna do is we're gonna do it once this week. We're going to be successful, and that success is going to feel fantastic.

[00:06:28] It's gonna fill you with hope, and it's gonna spark you to do it again and again because the results feel great because you did what you set out to do.

[00:06:39] **Dalia Colón:** Yes. Because that's like the person who never works out and says, I'm gonna go to the gym five days a week and I'm gonna do an hour long spinning class, and then an hour of weights, and they do it once.

[00:06:49] **Wendy Wesley:** Yes. So this is all part of setting smart goals. It's, it's, it's something that we use in counseling is we set smart goals for people. And so the second thing we do is I ask them to pick the day of the week that

they're going to do it. So this builds in this no fail. Kind of routine cuz a lot of people say, you know what?

[00:07:09] I need to cook more at home. But if we don't have a real, an actionable roadmap, it's likely to not happen. So we set a low goal, we say it's gonna happen one time, and then I force their hand. I make them say, what night is it gonna be? And I'm always going for Tuesday. Tuesday is always the night. I'm always going for, because it's not Monday, cuz sometimes Monday.

[00:07:28] Things aren't ready to go on Monday, but by Tuesday maybe we can have that shopping done and we can have everything in the house ready to go, and then Tuesday's early enough in the week that if once we do it we are successful and the rest of the week can, we can go back to normal.

[00:07:43] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, I would've thought Saturday or Sunday because they would have more time.

[00:07:47] **Wendy Wesley:** What I want to do is I'm trying to help people do this on a night where they have worked, because a vast majority of these meals that are a restaurant and takeout are happening Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and I like to tell people Friday and Saturday night can be for fun. So go out to a restaurant on Friday or Saturday night.

[00:08:07] Do it right, get a little dressed. , go to your favorite restaurant, order exactly what you want. But I'm more concerned about what I call the grind Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday third. I say it like that cuz it sometimes feels like a grind. I want people to learn how to just cook a simple nutrient dense meal on a Tuesday night.

[00:08:28] **Dalia Colón:** That makes sense. Learn how to fit it into your everyday routine. Yes. So those are the first two.

[00:08:33] **Wendy Wesley:** I also ask them as number three to pick, let's figure out what it's gonna. I have found that it works better when they go into a plan and they know what they're going to cook. And so we talk about what are some of your favorite restaurant foods?

[00:08:46] How can we replicate that at home on a home cook scale without industrial technology and industrial equipment and industrial sugar? What can, how can we do this at home? Um, and so we work through something that they, they like to eat. Sometimes I'll encourage them to do a bowl, a restaurant style bowl with a grain.

[00:09:05] Some roasted vegetables, a protein, and then some toppings. And so once they figured out what those things are, it's achievable. It's doable.

[00:09:14] **Dalia Colón:** On our own without your expert advice, do we tend to choose recipes that are like too complicated or too heavy of a lift for a Tuesday?

[00:09:23] **Wendy Wesley:** Yeah, we do. In fact, um, I was talking to, um, Janet Keeler one time about a cookie swap.

[00:09:29] She said that some people were coming to the cookie swap with no cookies because they chose a recipe that was absolutely beyond them. And so it, it turned into another conversation that Janet and I had about helping people choose recipes that are doable, manageable, and sane, because some recipes I've read are completely insane.

[00:09:50] And so I like to try and help people look at a recipe and say, that is within my skillset and my reach, and this one is not.

[00:09:57] **Dalia Colón:** Yep, totally fair. You and Janet are the dream team. , longtime, uh, food writer for the Tampa Bay Times. Mm-hmm. . I have found that sometimes I'll make something and I feel like I'm in over my head.

[00:10:07] I remember I made this Rachel Ray ravioli from scratch one time, and it was the pasta from scratch and then it was like the spinach filling. My kitchen was a mess. It tasted amazing, but I never made it. So I like to have my catalog of recipes that I know I can put together quickly on a weeknight. So that's a great tip.

[00:10:26] **Wendy Wesley:** Right. And so for this bowl, I encourage them to do, they might consider doing, is on a Sunday afternoon. I'm not one for big meal prep, but I am one for a little bit of advanced cooking. So you cook a grain on Sunday. Without the intention of eating it, you just cook the grain and that's rice. It's pasta, quinoa, pharaoh, sorghum, whatever it, whatever the flavor of the day is, and you just cook it and you put it in the fridge and it is there ready to go for the week coming up.

[00:10:53] I also encourage people to roast some vegetables in advance and then putting them in the fridge. You have no intention of eating them. You just roast them and they're there. They're kind of like your soldiers. They're ready to go for the week ahead.

[00:11:06] **Dalia Colón:** Oh that's great. And then what would you do the night of?

[00:11:09] **Wendy Wesley:** The night of. I would, uh, so say I'm gonna make this bowl. I might, uh, bring that grain to room temperature by bringing it out early, letting it sit on the counter. I might heat it up just a little bit so the grain's, not ice cold, refrigerator cold, and then put that grain in the bottom of the bowl. Heat up some of those maybe in the microwave.

[00:11:26] Those roasted vegetables, those roasted vegetables go in. Perhaps I've got some chicken that, uh, I, I encourage people to get a rotisserie. On Sunday from this grocery store as a way to have a cooked protein ready to go. So there's your chicken, and if you wanna throw some feta cheese on top and maybe some seeds, some or nuts, that's your crunchy stuff on top.

[00:11:47] A little dressing. There's your bowl.

[00:11:50] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, that's so doable. And the rotisserie chicken is like the hero of the story. Cause you can do a million things with it if you eat chicken.

[00:11:56] **Wendy Wesley:** Right. If you really wanna take rotisserie chicken one step further, pick off the meat, boil the bones, and it's a great stock for its simple chicken noodle soup.

[00:12:05] **Dalia Colón:** Ooh, okay. That's next level. That's advanced. Well that's level 2 0 1 . Okay.

[00:12:22] Okay, so what's your next tip? I love that.

[00:12:24] **Wendy Wesley:** So we picked the menu. I like to, if you are living alone, and a lot of my clients are single people, invite a friend to partake in this meal with you or invite a friend to be your accountability partner. You give them permission to. Did you do what you said you were gonna do, which is eat dinner at home on Tuesday night.

[00:12:44] So it's either inviting a friend to participate or inviting a friend, giving them permission to call you out on your, you know what to say. Did you do what you intended to do? And it's called an accountability partner.

[00:12:55] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, that's so important. I was just remembering. When I first moved to St. Pete, I lived in an apartment alone and my next door neighbor was a single mom, the little boy who little kids don't eat that much.

[00:13:05] And she and I would swap. So we would each cook something and then I would give her half of my lasagna and she would give me half of her stew. And then we had two meals out of it. So if you are living alone, that's another idea. If you're not gonna freeze it or if you don't want to eat it all week, it's another way to stretch it..

[00:13:24] **Wendy Wesley:** I like that idea a lot. And again, that's, that's involving others in your plans. You're also giving, you gave your neighbor an opportunity to share and to give, and she gave that right back to you. So that induced a lot of good feelings around cooking at home.

[00:13:41] **Dalia Colón:** Yeah, for sure. I know. I think about them. That little boy is, is probably in college now.

[00:13:46] Okay. What, what number are we on? Number 6?

[00:13:48] **Wendy Wesley:** Number 6. I want you to take a picture of what you're doing and share it. That could be social media, and if you're not a social media person, that's fine. Share it with a friend, text a friend. Here's what I did. So you're not bragging. It's not about bragging.

[00:14:05] It really is about just including other people in what you're doing. , so share it and if you wanna share it on social media, I highly encourage that because I want to get people talking about home cooking more. I'm very passionate about home cooking As a dietician, I think it is our nutrition, salvation, and I, I love restaurants, don't get me wrong, but I have never seen so many heavy users of restaurant and takeout and prepared foods in my entire career.

[00:14:32] **Dalia Colón:** Wow. That's saying something. And I love seeing what people are eating. It's fun. I love seeing what's in people's grocery cart. I'm in a Facebook group called Foodie's, home Creations. Mm-hmm. . And it's just people posting pictures of their food and then Yes. You know, some people are like over the top, like my friend Bryce, and he's got a garden with this husband, and that makes me feel inferior.

[00:14:53] But it's so cool to see what they pick and, and how they turn it into dinner. Mm-hmm. . Right. Okay. What's your last tip?



[00:14:59] **Wendy Wesley:** The last one is, as with any goal setting exercise, we have to monitor results and so I ask people to monitor results in these four ways. One, I want, I want you to monitor your bank account. . I have a couple, uh, clients as couples.

[00:15:16] I started working with them last February and they were heavy restaurant takeout, prepared foodies or eaters. They wanted to change it. They also wanted to take a dream trip to Paris, so we took a look at what they were spending every month and figured out a way to re. A majority of that food money into a fund in their bank account called Paris.

[00:15:39] They created a fund in their bank account and they redirected that money to the fund. Long story short, this past October they went to Paris on the money that they saved from eating out in restaurants.

[00:15:51] **Dalia Colón:** That's incredible. You must feel so proud.

[00:15:52] **Wendy Wesley:** I do. I do. And the thing is, they didn't realize how much of their income was going to feed themselves from restaurant and takeout food until they really sat down and they did the math and they said, we are staring at our trip to Paris.

[00:16:06] We're staring at it right here. And so they cooked more at home. They lost some weight. They took a fantastic trip..

[00:16:13] **Dalia Colón:** Amazing. And I'm sure the food tastes better at a restaurant in Paris anyway.

[00:16:18] **Wendy Wesley:** Right, right. Yeah. The other thing I want people to take a look at is how are you sleeping and what is your energy level based on home cooking?

[00:16:28] So restaurant food, the portions are gargantuan. , you pay a lot of money for it, and you can be goaded to finish all of it because you paid a lot of money for it. Also, everyone around you, their portions are big, so it normalizes these large portions. And restaurant food is just, it tends to be higher in calories, higher in fat, higher in salt.

[00:16:50] Lots of other deep fried options things you, you may not deep fry at home, but if you get food in a restaurant, they'll come with deep fried onion straws on top so you can see how things are always, they, there's just kind of



ramping up the flavor profile with sugar, salt, fat flour to make the food irresistible.

[00:17:08] So when you are reducing things like added sugar, refined flowers, lots of heavy saturated. , you may find that your fiber intake increases, therefore your nutrient density increases. You may have a better night's sleep, and you may have better energy during the day just from eating at home versus doing a lot of restaurant and takeout food.

[00:17:29] **Dalia Colón:** Wow, that's great. And when I eat restaurant food, because it has so much salt, I get so thirsty.

[00:17:34] **Wendy Wesley:** Right, right. And then that's that chronic inflammation. When you're always eating a very, very high, high sodium diet, you're always, you know, kind of entertaining a certain amount of inflammation in the body because the tissues are full of fluid because the food is full of salt.

[00:17:50] Oh man. Lastly, I ask people to monitor hope and. . These are kind of like some hippie things I talk about. I always say, people come to me for their stomach and we end up working on the head, but when you start to change your behavior, you start to experience something called hope and then belief in yourself that I really can make changes.

[00:18:13] There is hope that things can change. So many people embark on a diet, an exercise plan, a new way of eating, and then they may. Hope is dashed and belief in themselves is reduced. When we can do this gradually ease into the shallow end of this, we can build things like hope and belief. Hope and belief is the key to sustainability.

[00:18:37] We have to have hope and belief that things can get better and can stay better for us to continue with a plan.

[00:18:44] **Dalia Colón:** That's powerful. And once you succeed in one area, the area of food, you realize you can make other changes. I used to listen to the Dave Ramsey show, financial expert. Mm-hmm. , and he would put people on sort of a financial diet and many of them would end up losing weight or making other changes because they saw that they could be in control of their life, so, that's, that's pretty powerful. Okay. Just a personal question for you. What do you do, because, , it's, it's wonderful when we have our grains prepped and our veggies and our rotisserie chicken. But do you ever find yourself in a situation where there's nothing ready to go in the house? And what would, what do you do in those situations?

[00:19:25] What's your go-to?

[00:19:27] **Wendy Wesley:** For my clients, I give them a list of snacks, and these snacks all have the one thing in the same thing in common. They have protein, they have fiber, and they have. . So what I will do when I'm really, I have, I don't feel like cooking. There's nothing in the house. I will gather two or three of my favorite snacks, and I call it dinner.

[00:19:45] And what I do is I give my clients permission to kind of redefine a meal or redefine dinner. And sometimes dinner can be, I know some people might think this is crazy, but trikes and hummus, peanuts and raisins, and some rotisserie chicken that I pulled off the bird. , that might sound a little crazy, but it's the reframing of what does it mean to eat a meal?

[00:20:10] And it can be a collection of two or three of your favorite snacks.

[00:20:14] **Dalia Colón:** No that doesn't sound crazy at all. That sounds amazing. And, and maybe even a relief if you live with other people. Mm-hmm. , and they're used to having the same type of food for dinner. It might be fun to have finger foods one night.

[00:20:25] **Wendy Wesley:** Mm-hmm. . Right. So really a meal is something that, first, it satisfies hunger. It puts fuel in the system. And then secondly, it provides some comfort and nutrition. And so if you can identify some of your favorite snacks that again, have these things in, they've got some protein, they've got some fiber. and they have some, some nutrient density and wherever.

[00:20:46] I'm always pushing color. Where you see color is where you find nutrient density. If you can find a, some snacks that meet those criteria and just give yourself permission, I'm gonna have cheese and crackers and apples and peanuts for dinner. I've done it thousands of time.

[00:21:01] **Dalia Colón:** Oh, that makes me feel so much better, and I would love to have that.

[00:21:04] Maybe I'll have that for lunch today. Wendy, thank you for all these amazing tips. Is there anything else that you wanted to tell?

[00:21:10] **Wendy Wesley:** I am, uh, doing some cooking classes in 2023, and it is not high end. It is not gourmet. It is really what am I gonna cook on a random Tuesday night? That is what these cooking lessons are all about.

[00:21:22] It's just what do I do in my home kitchen to nourish me and kind of change this habit I may have developed during the pandemic post pandemic of relying too much on other people preparing food for me.

[00:21:36] **Dalia Colón:** I've seen photos of your cooking classes on social media, and it is very doable, beautiful, and affordable.

[00:21:44] So what more could we ask for? Where can we find more information about that?

[00:21:49] **Wendy Wesley:** I have the whole series listed and available on my website. It's [wendywesleynutrition.com](http://wendywesleynutrition.com).

[00:21:54] **Dalia Colón:** Very cool. Well, thank you, Wendy. I'm feeling full of hope. And what was the other word that you said?

[00:22:00] **Wendy Wesley:** Belief. Hope and belief. Hope that change can happen, and belief that I can.

[00:22:06] **Dalia Colón:** I can. Well, thank you. With your help, we can. So I appreciate your time once again.

[00:22:11] **Wendy Wesley:** I love coming on. Thank you so much.

[00:22:14] **Dalia Colón:** Wendy Wesley is the St. Petersburg based dietician and nutritionist. You can find her simple recipe for pancake collard greens on our website, [thezestpodcast.com](http://thezestpodcast.com). I'm Dalia Colon. I produce The Zest with Andrew Lucas.

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