

How we eat now

Secrets of the High Street takeaways



Emma Freud finds out how to make her family's favourite takeaways at home. But do they taste as good?

@emmalfreud

A conversation with my 13-year-old son, Spike:

Spike, I've had an idea... you're choosing tonight's supper and cooking it.

I'll pass, thanks. It's probably for an article about boys cooking or something so you're only trying to use me to make a point. Again.

Okay, how about this... if you were going to cook dinner, what would you make?

Nando's.

No you have to cook it, not buy it.

Oh... then... Nando's. I'd cook Nando's.

And how would you do that?

You buy chicken, you buy Nando's sauce. You cook it, and then you eat it. Or pizza.

Now we're talking, what flavour of pizza?

Pizza Express pizza.

So that went well. I think the point is that this post-millennial generation is so used to takeaways that the ideal home-cooked meal is something which tastes as close as possible to fast food. So reader, I have a plan... making brilliant copycat fast food at home. The trick is making it look and taste as close as possible to something that arrived on a bike, while using healthy and easy-to-buy ingredients. There's a multitude of information available online for making 'takeaways' at home, but I've done the hard work for you. These are my top tips.

Pizza Express-inspired pizzas

If I had a pound for every time I'd seen my children's 'underwhelmed' faces when I presented my homemade pizza, I wouldn't need to be writing this article. Turns out it's not the ingredients at fault; it's the heat of the oven. What you need is a stovetop pizza oven: they sit on your hob, take 12-15 minutes to get to over 300 degrees, and turn out crispy pizzas in less than 5 minutes. When a pizza cooks that fast, everything about it is better and so much more like a... what's the word... takeaway. Also FYI, dried oregano is Pizza Express's signature herb.

Big Mac-style burgers

This one's more complicated but eminently achievable. To be authentic, use only 45 grams of beef per patty (two patties for a Big Mac). The onion layer is made by chopping an onion very finely and drying it out in a microwave to intensify the flavour, before spreading under the patty, not over it. Then cheese, lettuce, two slices of pickle and 'special sauce' made by mixing mayonnaise, gherkin relish, grated onion, vinegar, sugar, mild mustard and my secret ingredient: Marmite.

Chicken tikka masala

The way to make this dish closer to a classic is to marinate the chicken in yogurt and spices, then char-griddle it to blacken the edges before adding it to the spicy tomato sauce.

Nando's-style chicken

Blitz lime juice, ginger, chilli flakes, sweet paprika, red wine vinegar, garlic, parsley, salt, pepper, olive oil and a shallot. Butterfly a whole chicken by cutting out the backbone, and smother in sauce. Marinate for an hour, then roast for 50 minutes in an oven set to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Serve with Nando's Hot Peri-Peri Sauce, which you can buy at Waitrose.

Sesame prawn toast

It never occurred to me that you could cook this at home. But you can, and it works. Blitz raw prawns, garlic, ginger, chilli, onion, an egg, soy sauce and sesame oil. Spread thickly onto day-old bread, cover with sesame seeds, and shallow fry.

Popcorn chicken

There is a magic ingredient here, and it's baking powder – that's what makes the nuggets puff. To fool even the most experienced KFC customer, take pieces of chicken, roll them in flour that you've seasoned with chilli powder, salt and baking powder, dunk them in buttermilk and roll in panko breadcrumbs. Then do all three again so the nugget has a double layer for massive crunch. Fry in vegetable oil, drain on kitchen paper, and you may find Bob is actually your uncle.

If none of the above work, buy some little takeaway containers, fake a conversation with a bike delivery guy ('How much? You've got to be kidding!'), and tell the children how lucky they are to have a parent like you who gets them takeaway.

4 Good Food contributing editor Emma Freud is a journalist and broadcaster, director of Red Nose Day and a co-presenter of Radio Four's *Loose Ends*.

Crispy duck with pancakes

It is a truth universally acknowledged that you can only get crispy duck pancakes in a Chinese restaurant. But this version takes half an hour and is easy, healthier, and just as good. Even the pancakes are a doddle; made with just three ingredients, they cook in seconds.

SERVES 2 PREP 10 mins COOK 30 mins EASY

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ½ cucumber, cut into thin matchsticks | for the plum sauce |
| small bunch spring onions, shredded | 5 plums, halved and stoned |
| for the duck | 50ml agave syrup |
| 1 tbsp honey | 1 tbsp soy sauce |
| 1 tsp Chinese five-spice powder | ½ tsp Chinese five-spice powder |
| 2 duck breasts (about 170g each) | for the pancakes |
| | 150g plain flour |
| | rapeseed oil, for brushing |

The duck

Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Mix the honey and five-spice in a bowl, then brush all over the duck. Transfer to a roasting tin and roast for 25-30 mins until bronzed. Cool for 10 mins, then shred the meat and finely slice the skin.

Sauce

While the duck is cooking, put all the plum sauce ingredients in a saucepan and simmer gently over a medium heat for 15 mins or until the plums are soft and the sauce is thick. Using a stick blender, blend until smooth.

Pancakes

While the sauce is cooking, put the flour, 125ml boiling water and a pinch of salt in a bowl and mix together until it forms a dough. When cool enough to handle, knead for 5-10 mins. Divide it into 10 little balls and roll each one out as thin as you can. Brush a frying pan with the oil and cook each pancake over a medium heat for 20 secs each side or until cooked but not browned.

To serve

Spread a pancake with a little plum sauce. Top with the shredded duck, a few pieces of cucumber and spring onion.

PER SERVING 402 kcal • fat 18g • saturates 5g • carbs 44g • sugars 19g • fibre 3g • protein 13g • salt 0.9g

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