

Veg Mastery Program Q&A 4 with Lara Adler, CHHC. Topic: Vegan Comfort Food
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TREVOR: Hello, everyone. This is Trevor Justice with the Vegetarian Health Institute. Tonight's call is on the vegan comfort foods and our guest expert is Lara Adler. How are you doing, Lara.

LARA: I'm well. Glad to be here again on one of your calls.

TREVOR: Excellent. So as we both know. You're vegan. And I was vegan for a long time. I still am when I go out to restaurants. I still just say I'm vegan because I don't want dairy or eggs unless it's free range and organic. So it can be hard for people new giving up eggs and dairy and all the things that are made with them to enjoy.

It can be hard from them when they're feeling deprived of their favorite foods. That's why we made this lesson. Do you have any general thoughts to share right off the bat?

LARA: I guess the only thing I would share. For people who are transitioning. And we've talked about this before. And I'm sure you've talked about this on calls I haven't been on. When people are transitioning, they hold a little bit more tightly to the foods they are accustomed to eating.

The macaroni and cheese. The cake. The cupcakes. Brownies. Ice cream. And they'll also look for substitutes. Alternatives as they first transition. The problem is a lot of those alternatives are really not healthy.

TREVOR: You mean fakin' bacon isn't super healthy for you?

LARA: Not really. And some of the soy ice creams on the market. They taste great. Trust me. I've had every single one of them. Because I'll tell you when I first became vegan. The only non-dairy ice cream that was on the market was Rice Dream and it was terrible. It was terrible.

So when the new soy ice creams came out, I thought they were great. I ate them like they were going out of style. But the ingredients on those products are just as long as some of the ingredients on the non-vegan or non-vegetarian products. And it doesn't necessarily mean that they're healthier because they don't have animal products in them.

TREVOR: Years ago I was eating a pint of Tofutti and I happened to look and actually read the ingredient list, the first ingredient was oil.

LARA: Right.

TREVOR: I was eating frozen oil.

LARA: What I came to learn, not to disparage Tofutti in anyway. The company who makes Tofutti is not vegan for ethical reasons. They're vegan for religious reasons. It's a Jewish company. And they created a line of products people could consume alongside meat products. Because they are fully dairy free.

TREVOR: Okay. Do you want to explain why that.

LARA: I'm not a practicing religious person so I don't really know a lot of what the fundamental tenants are.

TREVOR: I'll explain it then. I'm Jewish. People that are religious Jews separate their dairy from their meat because there's some saying that you're not supposed to bathe a calf in its mother's milk.

That was interpreted to mean that if you have a milk meal, you cannot have meat in that same meal. If you have meat, then you cannot have milk. That's why, for example, if a religious Jewish family is having a meat meal, when they have dessert they'll serve Cool Whip instead of whip cream.

Because they're not allowed to have dairy in that meal. So you're saying that Tofutti wasn't really designed for us. It was designed for Jewish people, so when they've had a meat meal, they can have something that resembles ice cream.

LARA: Yes. And if you go into any Kosher grocery store. They typically have a selection of Tofutti products that blows your mind. Because they don't have any of these products in your regular health food store that may carry Tofutti ice cream sandwiches or Tofutti ice cream.

They have vienetta cakes and this whole array. This whole line that they just don't really market to regular grocery stores. They are famous for having partially hydrogenated oils in all of their product line, save for maybe one or two. It's absolutely not a healthy food. But if somebody's transitioning and that's the only thing that they can find.

Yes. Having it a few times certainly isn't going to kill you. And the idea is as you're transitioning to either fully vegetarian or fully vegan diet, to find things that are going to assimilate those non-vegan or non-vegetarian foods that you are leaving behind.

TREVOR: But not be so unhealthy.

LARA: Right. But not be so unhealthy. And you can use these sort of easy finds like the soy ice creams in the freezer section as a stepping stone. But you don't want to hang out there permanently.

TREVOR: Exactly. Let's bring that over to your banana ice cream recipe that you provided for this lesson. It's my understanding that bananas are higher in fat than most fruits, except for avocados of course.

But when you compare them to apples or peaches. They're fairly high in fat. And that's one of the reasons they make a good ice cream substitute. So talk to us about that.

LARA: Well, this is a really surprising dessert. It sounds simple and sometimes you can look at the recipe and go. Eh, it's probably going to be gross. I've learned and experienced. I've cooked enough recipes and made enough recipes in my life to be able to look at a recipe and be like that's suspect. Because it's not going to taste good. I know those ingredients.

But this is not one of those recipes, I promise you. It's deceptively simple. It's getting a bunch of bananas and letting them ripen on your countertop until they're really pretty ripe – yellow with brown spots. And then you cut them up, put them in a bag and freeze them.

TREVOR: Now let me stop you right there. Do you peel them before you freeze them or do you freeze them before you peel them.

LARA: I peel them and freeze them because they're so. In my former life I worked in so many smoothie and juice bars that I've just sort of gotten in the habit that everything is just prepped and ready to go.

If you freeze it with the peels on, the peels are really hard to get off once they're frozen. It's not really necessary. So you just cut them up into small chunks. One or two inch slices. You freeze them.

I didn't actually put any measurements in this recipe because it really depends on how much you're going to make. It doesn't refreeze as well so you should only make enough that you're going to eat right away. It doesn't refreeze that nicely. It tends to turn into a solid block and doesn't stay creamy.

The texture of this is like really perfect soft serve and you just throw it into a food processor or a Vita Mix or something like that would also work too. A food processor is ideal, especially if you're only working with a small amount. You're going to need a little bit of liquid to get the machine going and get the bananas chopped up.

I usually start with a little maple syrup and a little lime juice. I only add non-dairy milk to help move it around if it really needs it, but it doesn't need it for the creaminess or flavor or anything like that. It's really to just get the blades moving on the machine.

You don't want to add more maple syrup or more lime juice because then it's going to be either too tangy or too sweet. So adding a little bit of soy milk will adjust the texture without adjusting the flavor too much.

TREVOR: One thing I'm hearing is in order to keep it from getting too liquidy, you want to use as little liquid as possible. So if you don't need any soy or rice milk in order to get your machine moving, then just leave it out.

LARA: Right. Exactly. And the whole thing from opening your freezer door to sitting down and eating a bowl is 3 minutes top. So this is like a perfect summertime quick on the go I want some sweet dessert that feels like soft serve and is delicious.

I haven't actually experimented with adding different flavors like pieces of chocolate or cocoa powder, which I'm sure you could do. The maple and lime juice is quite delicious. This recipe came from my mother so I have to give her credit.

TREVOR: What's her name.

LARA: Her name is Lolly and she's actually been into raw foods a long time. This recipe qualifies save for the soy or rice milk. But you could always use almond milk.

TREVOR: Why don't we talk about the other recipe that you contributed for this lesson, which is the vegan brownies. Now what makes these brownies so good when a lot of people would think what makes these brownies so good without butter. What else would you normally use in traditional brownies? Would you use eggs?

LARA: Butter and eggs. Lots of butter and lots of eggs. I really like this recipe. You use tofu, but you don't use too much. The tofu, because this is a dense fudgy brownie, the tofu will help create that texture. If you use a commercial egg replacer instead of the tofu, it doesn't really come out the same.

Because the tofu not only adds denseness, but it also adds moisture that a powdered commercial egg replacer product really wouldn't. I like that this is sweetened naturally. It's sweetened with maple syrup and sucanat.

If you're not familiar with sucanat, it's really a brand name product. Sucanat is a compounded form of the word sugar cane and natural and it's just 100% dehydrated cane juice. It's dry like granulated sugar but looks more like brown sugar.

TREVOR: How is sucanat better for you or less bad for you than white sugar?

LARA: Well, it's not really less bad for you. It's still sugar. It's still a simple carbohydrate straight up. However, because it has minimal processing, it actually retains the natural molasses in the product and that's what gives it its brown color.

If you buy traditional Dominos brown sugar, what you're really buying is refined white sugar with molasses added in. And sucanat doesn't have that property. Just dehydrated cane juice.

It does have a flavor that's a little bit unique. It takes a little while for some people. It's not a very strong flavor, but it does have its own flavor. Some people put it in coffee and they like the flavor that it adds. Between the sucanat and the small amount of maple syrup, it's not relying on heavily refined sweeteners, which I like.

TREVOR: Why use the two different kinds of sweeteners? Why not just one?

LARA: I really adding maple syrup to this. I actually haven't made it without maple syrup. If you notice, in the recipe it calls for one cup of sucanat and only two tablespoons of maple syrup. Part of the reason, and I'm trying to remember why. Because this is a recipe that I modified heavily.

I believe I added the maple syrup is because either the batter was too dry and it needed a little extra liquid and I didn't want to add it in the form of oil. And two tablespoons of sweetener isn't going to make too much of a difference either way. It could very well be that's why I added it. I've been making this for a while so I don't really remember how I came to that. Trust me, it's good.

TREVOR: That makes sense. Actually you bring up a really good point. When you're making vegan desserts and your choosing between a liquid sweetener and a dry sweetener, how does that choice impact the final product. And how do you gauge which to use or how much to use in balance.

LARA: You definitely want to keep the ratio of what is dry as close to the original recipe as possible. If you switch for example from granulated sugar to maple syrup. Or if you eat honey or agave. It's going to really impact your end product a lot. It could collapse, be too wet or not bake right because it's too wet.

You have to slowly tweak these things. Sometimes experimentation is your friend here. You may need to make the recipe a few times and just keep track of how you swap them out. You can also adjust. And it works better if the things you are swapping out wet for dry are in smaller quantities.

Maybe you can add just an extra tablespoon or two of flour to a recipe where you use a liquid sweetener instead of a dry sweetener. You may need to play with it. But you really want to try to keep the ratios the same. That's why I have said that in this recipe I opted for the half a cup of silken tofu.

One because it adds density. But two because it also is adding moisture that some of the dry egg replacers don't really add as well as the silken tofu. You have to be mindful when making substitutions like that in your recipe that you want to keep it approximately the same as the original recipe if it's something you're modifying.

TREVOR: Now let's talk about cheese. We did have a whole other lesson on it. That is lesson 15 called vegan cheese and cream, but it comes up again here. Because when I survey people and ask what comfort foods they miss the most. Pizza and macaroni and cheese are commonly brought up as foods that folks are missing.

I guess I'll mention in the vegan cheese and cream lesson, we had a variety of nut-based cheese recipes from raw food chefs like Cherie Soria. Mainly from her. We also had a cashew whip-type thing from Nomi Shannon. But the one that was from more of a cooked recipe was Jo Stepaniak, which was her cashew cheese sauce.

I'll tell you the ingredients. From what you said a minute ago, you can get an idea of what it might taste like. It's a half cup of cashew butter. 2-3 tablespoons lemon juice. 3 tablespoons nutritional yeast flakes. 1 ½ tablespoons miso. 1 teaspoon onion powder. A pinch of garlic powder. A cup of water and salt. Basically you put it all in a food processor and blend it.

She said this isn't exactly going to have the exact texture of regular cheese, but it's pretty close. Do you have any other suggestions on someone who wants to make a vegan cheese for their macaroni and cheese.

LARA: Again, this goes to what we'll touch on shortly. Is this idea of moving away from these stepping stone foods. When I first became vegan and for a solid ten years after that, I had a lot of. Again, this is before I really got heavily into cooking and learning about foods. For me it was strictly about not having animal products. That's my criteria and the fit.

I have this cookbook. It was the very first vegan cookbook that I ever received. It was more about beans than anything. And it was called *Bark and Grass*, which was a play on what people assume vegans eat. Bark and grass.

TREVOR: Bark and grass. Okay.

LARA: Like tree bark. And I still have this oil-stained, dog-eared, 'zine-stapled cookbook on my shelf after 17 years. I flipped through it recently and thought, I wouldn't make half of these things now. Well, one of the things I made very regularly to the point I didn't need the cookbook anymore.

I had the recipe down. It was a vegan mac and cheese sauce. It was flour, nutritional yeast, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, water and a tremendous amount of margarine. I just regularly. It's so unhealthy when I think about it now. My stomach just turns.

TREVOR: The sight of all that margarine.

LARA: So much margarine. I don't know. Like 6 tablespoons or something ridiculous. Probably more. I don't even know. It's a lot.

TREVOR: So keep going.

LARA: For a long time that was really what I ate, but I got tired of the way it used to make me feel, which was very heavy. Probably because of the stick of margarine in there. It definitely took a while, but those types of foods eventually just lost their appeal for me and I began to develop new comfort foods. These comfort foods were more whole foods based.

So I haven't really on speaking on the macaroni and cheese front. I sort of wiped that out of my repertoire of things that I made only because I made it so often and I made it in such an unhealthy way. It wasn't something that I really wanted to revisit. I haven't tried making the cashew-based cheeses myself because mostly to me.

Regardless of whether it's an exceptionally healthy form of fat to eat, it is a tremendous amount of cashews. And I think that those types of dishes, comfort food or otherwise, should be consumed sparingly and in moderation. Just in the number of calories alone in a dish like that. Obviously comfort foods are supposed to be calorie-laden and indulgent.

TREVOR: I've heard it said. And this does make sense. If we were living in the wild and we happened to come across cashews or almonds or peanuts. Any nut. And we had to crack each one individually out of the shell by hand. How many would we really go to the trouble to open up? Would it be equivalent to a cup of almond butter or a cup of peanut butter or a cup of cashews?

LARA: Right. And I think of that when I eat pistachios. Because you have to open them.

TREVOR: It's so easy if you buy almond butter or peanut butter or even if you have a bunch of shelled cashews. Or make a whipped-type cashew cream, which tastes amazing. But it's so easy to really eat in a large quantity more than you ever would if you were harvesting the food in the wild and having to shell each one by hand.

It's not that we shouldn't eat it. It's just to be mindful of eating in moderation.

LARA: Definitely. That said, I'm sure that the recipe you had just run through before that's posted on the site. Like that sounds really good. And it might be something that I'll give a shot myself because it's been a really long time since I've made any kind of macaroni and cheese.

TREVOR: Well, I don't eat pasta anymore. So it's not for me. But this lesson isn't for the evolved people who have already gravitated towards whole foods. This lesson is for the folks who are new to this diet. And really crave those traditional comfort foods. But I do hear about what had to say about your evolution toward eating more whole foods.

LARA: It took a really long time. With the clients that I see I talk about this regularly. Because sometimes they expect to effect change in their diet immediately. And I have to explain to them that everything that they're doing every day is a process and an edit and I've been eating this way for 17 years.

The way I eat today is not the same way I ate a year ago. It's substantially different from how I ate four years ago. And infinitely more different than how I ate 10 years ago. As you sort of surround yourself and become enveloped in this community of people who have different perspectives and different information.

And as information comes out about food and food production. And the environment and ecological impact. And ethical impact. Social justice issues. There's really no end to it. I wouldn't want or expect even somebody who's transitioning to a vegetarian or vegan diet to feel like they have to just hit all the nails on the head at once. It's not possible. It's a step and it's a journey. For me, like I said I've been doing this for so long.

I've been through every iteration of vegan from being militant to gramilitant (sp?). No honey. No white sugar. Because it was filled with bone chalk. Vegan to the junk food I eat at Taco Bell and Subway sandwiches. Look, this Duncan Hines cake mix happens to be vegan because it's got so many chemicals in it, there's not any real food in there.

To the soy boy or soy hotdog or Boca burger eating vegan. I've done all those things. I recognize that they have their place. In my life they had their place. And they helped me to move forward. I don't think that anybody should feel badly if that's the position or state that they're in. Because it's a process and you learn constantly.

So my personal journey has been through all these stages. Now I've come to the point where 75-80% of the foods that I buy doesn't have packaging or doesn't come in a box or a bag. It's not branded with anything. These are straight fruits and vegetables, grains, beans, and that's the way I roll right now. That's the way I roll.

It's great. I think it's taken me this much time to be able to be comfortable in each stage that I've been in that I can say. Okay. I have this down now. I know how to eat this way. Now I'm going to expand my knowledge and my consciousness and learn about maybe this element that I didn't know about.

Now I'm ready to change another aspect. So everything is in steps. Maybe you don't have a goal of having this perfect whole-food based diet. Maybe your diet is strictly to cut out foods of animal origin or whatnot from your diet. That's fine. But you can still always refine it. There's always more to learn. And I think that's a really important perspective for people to have, especially as they're transitioning. Hopefully that's been helpful.

TREVOR: I'm going to pull up the recipes from this lesson again and see what else I want to ask you. This kind of ties into the lesson you wrote a while back on vegan bacon. There is a recipe submitted by Colleen Patrick-Gudreau on vegan pancakes called no-fuss pancakes. So for people that think pancakes need to be made with eggs. How can this recipe be successful?

LARA: Well, this recipe is successful because of the inclusion of baking powder. Baking powder is really what makes these pancakes fluffy and light like pancakes are supposed to be as opposed to a more crepe-like pancakes. I've had a lot of vegan pancake recipes come out dense and gooey and not at all like real pancakes.

This recipe she lists here is really a pretty basic foundational typical vegan pancake looks like. Baking powder. And I believe you mention this in the vegan baking lesson. Baking powder is going to act as a leavener, which means it's going to cause the pancakes to rise with the application of heat.

Baking soda needs to have an acid like a vinegar or a lemon juice or even chocolate is an acid to create leavening action to rise. They use baking soda and vinegar to make volcano mountains like we did in first grade. Baking powder includes baking soda and an acid in a dry form, and it reacts with heat.

What makes these pancakes work, basically, is baking powder. For people who are vegetarians and not vegan, there are also pancake recipes that use eggs and baking powder and that's fine, too. But for this particular recipe, it's the baking powder that makes the magic happen.

TREVOR: Well let's take a look at this French toast recipe called Fast and Fabulous French Toast, also contributed by Colleen.

LARA: This recipe also looks good. I haven't made French toast in a while, but I think if I remember correctly, when I did make French toast. And a lot of vegan recipes will have this. They'll take a mashed banana or a half banana and they'll mash it in with milk to give it a little bit more sustenance.

TREVOR: Interesting. So it's a sort of liquidy banana mush mixture.

LARA: Yes. I'm just looking. Her recipe is one cup of milk and one teaspoon of vanilla. She's just dipping it into the milk, cinnamon and vanilla. You can take for that amount of milk a quarter cup of the banana (1/2 a small banana). And if you mash it up really well and mix that into the milk, it's going to stick to the bread.

And it also will brown and caramelize on the grill. And it adds another level of sweetness. Cinnamon goes with it. I always put cinnamon in my French toast batter. I have not actually tried making a vegan French toast using ground flax seed.

TREVOR: We talked about that in lesson 10. Vegan baking. Using a mixture of that.

LARA: The mixture is 1 tablespoon of ground flax seed.

TREVOR: I'll pull it up.

LARA: Yeah, thanks. I don't have it in front of me. But either way, it's ground flax seed mixed with water. This recipe makes the equivalent of one egg and you can add that into the non-dairy milk, the cinnamon and the vanilla. Or you can try. I don't remember if I tried it because it's been a while since I had French toast.

The flax eggs, because they become very gelatinous, much like an egg white. Will allow the batter, which is really thin, to really adhere to the bread. As opposed to just run right off. Which often happens if you are just dipping the bread in the bowl.

TREVOR: So let me clarify a couple of things. So the instruction you've given in lesson 10 in vegan baking. In order to replace one egg, use a whisk or fork and whisk one tablespoon of ground flax seed into three tablespoons of water. And let it stand for 5 minutes.

So this would create something that had the consistency of an egg white. And that's why you're calling it flax eggs. It's not in the shape of an egg. It's just a gelatinous mixture that can be used in baking similar to an egg white.

LARA: Similar to a whole egg really.

TREVOR: Similar to a whole egg. So I'm curious after why you described the banana method of mashing about a half cup. Did you say half cup or quarter cup?

LARA: About a quarter cup.

TREVOR: So there's one option. Option A. Making the French toast recipe as it is with just the non-dairy milk. Option 2. You take a quarter cup of banana, mash it up and mix it in with the non-dairy milk and use that to soak the bread.

Option 3 is you take something like a tablespoon of ground flax seed, mix it into the non-dairy milk and let it stand for 5 minutes. And that would create an eggy, sort of gelatinous mixture. How does someone choose between those three options? What would be the difference in the final product?

LARA: Experiment because that is purely taste. The flax egg, because flax has a slightly nutty flavor, is going to come out in the French toast. But that may work to your advantage. So if you're having. Honestly you could probably mix a little bit of banana and a little bit of flax too. That's option D, I guess.

TREVOR: We have to save that for the advanced workshop.

LARA: Okay. The flax one would have somewhat of a nutty flavor to it. Whether or not you like that is just personal taste. The same thing with the banana. Because it does taste like banana. It's not overwhelming. But you do get sort of an aroma of fried banana with that finished product. That may also be something that somebody wants or it could be the best thing in the world.

It's really just taste. French toast is a great thing so make it three ways or make it four ways. Go A, B, C, D. One Sunday a month, a different type of French toast every Sunday. And you'll figure out which one you like the best. There's no right or wrong answer. It's just your preference.

TREVOR: So let's take a look at the other recipes we have on this lesson. We also have the World's Best and Easiest Chocolate Pudding. The key to this one, I guess, is the silken tofu. So how does tofu or the ingredients in this recipe. How does this come close to giving the recipe the quality of a traditional dairy-based chocolate pudding?

LARA: In all honesty I can't answer that. Because I don't remember what dairy chocolate pudding tastes like.

TREVOR: What makes it creamy?

LARA: It's definitely the silken tofu. And it's important that you get the silken tofu and not the. Silken tofu is often described as Japanese-style tofu. Or I've seen denser tofu with a more crumbly texture is often called Chinese-style tofu. You definitely want the Japanese-style tofu here.

Because it really is absolutely perfectly smooth when you blend it up. This recipe or a variation of this recipe. And I haven't thought about this in years. This is kind of embarrassing in a way. It's something that I've made since I first became vegan. In fact, when I was in high school, I took a speech class, a class on public speaking.

In speech class, we had to do an instructional demonstration of our choosing. And I chose to show people how you could make a vegan chocolate pudding in the middle of my class. I brought in a blender. And I brought in the tofu. And I was so nervous. I didn't even know if it tasted good. I actually haven't thought about that in years. Yeah, I did that.

For a really long time this is what I would use for chocolate pudding. This basic recipe is really good if you want to do a chocolate bottom pie. You get a nice homemade pie crust. And you put this in the bottom. And you can put sliced bananas on top. It sets up really nicely.

There's all kinds of different things that you can do with this. You can make a cannoli shell and put chocolate pudding in the center of the cannoli. It's adaptable. If you want to put a little almond extract in to make it almondy. You can put a little espresso and make it a mocha flavor.

There's all kinds of possibilities with these. This particular recipe or basic recipe I have a soft spot for. Because it was something that I used to make all the time.

TREVOR: Actually I want to throw in. I didn't put it here because I didn't think we needed two chocolate puddings in the same lesson. There is one that I've had raw foods friends make. And I've made it once or twice. Which is surprisingly very good. This is back when I still used agave nectar. Today I'd have to use maple syrup or brown rice syrup or something. You take a ripe avocado and you put it in the food processor with your liquid sweetener and your coco powder. You must process it until it is totally creamy and there's no more little chunks of green avocado. Because if you do it right and get it totally smooth and consistent. It'll be perfectly brown, perfectly creamy and super high in fact. So it's also an amazing chocolate pudding. But it doesn't last too long in the fridge. I would suggest that you probably should eat it within 24 hours.

LARA: I wonder if that would be a good base for a non-dairy ice cream because of the fat content. If you actually tried processing that through an ice cream machine?

TREVOR: That's a good question.

LARA: I know. Somebody out there better try and let us know.

TREVOR: It's pretty good as a chocolate pudding. The only thing is it is very difficult to not eat the whole thing in one sitting.

LARA: Right. Then you're like I just ate two avocados.

TREVOR: Avocados are good for you. But just like we talked about not eating nuts in excess. Gorging on multiple avocados in one sitting isn't the ideal thing either. But that's something. I'm sorry I don't have the right proportions in front of me.

If I had a guess, I'd say it was like one avocado. Probably a quarter to a half cup of the liquid sweetener. If you used brown rice, you'd have to use more because it's not as sweet as something like maple syrup. And then I'm guessing about a quarter cup of cocoa powder.

Once you get in your kitchen and start experimenting. Like when you said on your banana ice cream recipe, you didn't put exact proportions. The same here. You just kind of taste it and see if it needs more cocoa or more sweetener or what. The thing about raw foods. I remember learning this from the Boutenkos that if a recipe says use a cup of flour and a quarter cup of butter and a half a cup of sugar.

It's always going to come out exactly the same because flour, butter, sugar. They really don't vary. But when you're talking about whole raw foods. They could vary. An avocado isn't always the same. If it's a Hass avocado--

LARA: The bananas might not be very sweet.

TREVOR: That's right.

LARA: So you may have to adjust the sweetener.

TREVOR: Exactly. If your banana's not fully ripe, you might need more maple syrup. Whereas if it's a little overripe, maybe you don't need any maple syrup. That's a perfect example.

LARA: As an aside on that. I do not at all recommend making banana maple ice cream with even remotely unripe bananas. Unripe bananas are very starchy. And when you blend a starchy food like that. It becomes very goo-like. It can use if you use the wrong type of potatoes to make mashed potatoes. If you use waxy ones, it can get a very waxy feel to them like library paste.

You just want to make sure you're using ripe bananas. And for me, I think it's interesting. Because aside from the cornbread recipe which is at the bottom of this list. Nomi has the Alfredo sauce on here as well. But those are the only two savory recipes. The others are sweet.

Obviously comfort foods come in all types. Like Trevor and I had been talking just before the call started. Some things like pizza. And pizza is a really common food item in general. But it's also something new vegans can feel left out on. I mentioned to Trevor that I make pizzas at home semi-regularly.

For me it's not a matter of replacing the cheese with something else. It's a matter of creating a topping scenario that's so delicious on its own that it doesn't need the additional cheese. Pesto and sliced tomatoes. Pesto and grilled eggplant. Pesto and anything is delicious.

TREVOR: I'm a big fan of pesto, too.

LARA: Then you can get crazy and make a parsley pesto. Parsley pesto with walnuts. Or your traditional basil pesto with pineapple. You can make a garlic pesto in the summertime when garlic is fresh. You can use grilled vegetables. Oven dried vegetables. There's all kinds of ways you can make a pizza without having to rely on cheese or feel it's just not quite a pizza without cheese. I think that is something you can experiment with as well.

TREVOR: Back in the days when I ate pasta and Italian food. And just if people are wondering. I don't eat pasta because it's so refined. I really don't eat any flour products if I can help it. So that's why I don't eat pasta. But back when I did, I can remember being served pasta with tomato sauce. And even pizza bread on the side. And dipping the bread in the tomato sauce and eating it.

And it tasting good. So dipping that bread in the tomato sauce isn't that different than having a pizza crust with some really good tomato sauce on it. And then whatever toppings you might want. Maybe you want artichoke hearts or olives. It doesn't have the cheese. But it still tastes really good. So I'm just concurring with what you're saying.

LARA: I think that as you move away from animal foods. And then as you transition into more whole foods. What's going to inevitably happen is the quality of the foods that you're going to be buying is going to be elevated. Meaning your palate is going to change and things like really high quality olive oils are going to make a big difference to you.

The flavor of different olive oils is vast and can really make a dish shine. Even something as simple as artichoke and olives on pizza drizzled with a really high quality olive oil. That's the kicker that makes it really good. In my opinion, as people shift towards the more whole foods diet.

No, they don't have all the endless rows and isles in the supermarket to choose product from. But instead they have this vast array of fruits and vegetables. And then the quality of those fruits and vegetables are going to be the "selling factor." So the best quality that you can afford and the different varieties of really good quality sun dried tomatoes.

Organic foods. It's really going to step up your game in terms of the quality of the foods you are going to be able to make. Prego tomato sauce versus a really good homemade tomato sauce. All the stuff is in there for Prego. But the quality isn't very good. And I think that adds a whole other dimension to the idea of comfort foods.

It's far more than comfort in terms of familiarity. It's comfort on an emotional level. Knowing that the type of ingredients you are using are really the best out there and the best you can find.

TREVOR: Well, let's go to the last recipe. Or one of the last ones. The Yummy Cornbread. I am noticing. Now this is based on our earlier conversation. I see baking powder in here. And I see vegetable oil. Getting the idea of why this comes out so good even though there's no eggs or butter. Why don't you talk about that.

LARA: Exactly like you said. It's the aluminum-free baking powder. Baking powder is what's going to really give this the light cornbread texture and not like this dense cake of cornmeal. And the flavor that she has here. Salt is always needed.

She uses brown rice syrup or maple syrup as a sweetener. Soy milk. You could stop there and have a sweet cornbread. With the maple syrup and the soy milk. She goes one step further, which is great. She adds the kernels from a fresh ear of corn and hot peppers. Which really turns this into a savory cornbread.

Again, it's the baking powder that puts all the magic inside the cornbread. The sweet assumption of maple syrup and the awesomeness comes from adding fresh corn and chili peppers. The recipe is definitely worth trying. Even if the corn kernels and peppers are left out. You can also try this with blue corn flour, too. Which turns into the most beautiful light blue medium colored bread, which is unusual.

TREVOR: Yes. I forgot to mention. This recipe comes from Meredith McCarty. One of the recipes she gave me a while back was very similar to this. But she makes two separate batters. A yellow corn batter and the blue batter. Then she swirls them together.

LARA: Swirls them. Nice.

TREVOR: Beautiful. Let's talk about this last recipe. This is from Nomi Shannon. It's an Alfredo sauce. I have to admit that when Nomi introduced me to this recipe. She said it's kind of a versatile recipe. Depending on how much liquid you add to it, it could be used in a variety of ways. But one of those ways is that it can be used as an Alfredo type topping. Although she's thinking of it as a raw food recipe. She's not recommending putting it on a pot and heating it up. But rather just basically putting it on.

Let's say you drain your pasta. Put the pasta back in the pot which is still hot. Add this Alfredo sauce to the pot and that'll be enough to heat it up without putting a fire back under it.

LARA: I think it's also for people who maybe want to be a little more adventurous. My mother used to do this. Making zucchini noodles. Making basically a pasta out of zucchini, which would relegate this back into the fully raw food dish. But it's also good for somebody who's trying to watch their pasta intake. I believe either a mandolin slicer, which I know not everyone has. Or a spiralizer, which probably even less people have.

TREVOR: They can get it because do you sell those or can I refer them to Nomi's site?

LARA: I don't sell any products. If you have a good resource for that.

TREVOR: So Nomi sells those at www.rawgourmet.com. The spiralizer and the mandolin. Tell people what those do.

LARA: Well, the mandolin can do a couple of things. And it can give you paper-thin slices of pretty much anything. Most mandolins have an adjustable blade so you can adjust the thickness of what you are doing. So for people making sandwiches that want perfectly uniform sliced tomatoes. They use the mandolin.

Some mandolins have a second blade that comes up onto the bottom so you can, for example, cut a potato into French fry shape. You can create matchstick or julienne vegetables. It's great for really thin paper slices of anything. You can slice a beet in such a way that the light will pass through the slice and you can make all kinds of really beautiful things.

But if you take a zucchini lengthwise and cut it on a mandolin in really thin slices, you get these long flat ribbons. And then you can stack those ribbons up and cut them lengthwise again so you get fettuccini-like noodles. That's a great way to serve zucchini even if it's not as a replacement for pasta. Just in general. Toss that with a little apple cider vinegar and olive oil and thyme. There you go. You've got a little summer salad.

A spiralizer will actually create a literal spiral, almost like a pig's tail. A coil of cut vegetables. And that also is incredibly beautiful. You can do that. That really only works with hard vegetables like

carrots, beats, potatoes, or squash. You really wouldn't be able to do that with a tomato. But you can, I believe. Do you have a spiralizer?

TREVOR: No, I don't.

LARA: Or have you used one? I believe with those spiralizers, you can also make like an angel hair cut zucchini. I believe you can do that. It's really tiny long skinny tendrils of zucchini. It's really quite beautiful. You can do that as a replacement for a pasta noodle or just as a light delicious dish.

TREVOR: So do you have any closing thoughts on this topic?

LARA: My only closing thoughts would be to make sure that whatever comfort foods that you indulge in, that they're healthy. And that you do them with an understanding that whatever food item you're going to eat to comfort you. You're not looking to comfort yourself or cover up any emotional issues.

I know a lot of people when they think of comfort food. It's not so much the brownies and mashed potatoes thing. It's more like my boyfriend just broke up with me and I'm going to eat a pint of ice cream kind of comfort food. That's a whole other type of eating.

We're not really talking about that here. But that is something you should keep in mind as well. No food items that you ever eat is going to correct any kind of imbalance in your personal life. A little off topic, but at the same time it's not. I would just want to close with that.

TREVOR: I really appreciate your time tonight.

LARA: No problem. I'm happy to be here.

TREVOR: With that we'll say farewell to the people who were on tonight's call. We had to schedule this on a Sunday because I had a conflict for Monday. That's why we didn't get any questions. But I did see some people on the line listening to the call. I hope you enjoyed this. Remember this is lesson 28. Vegan comfort foods. So all the recipes we talked about today you'll find at vegan comfort foods.

Thanks a lot. You have a great night.

LARA: Thanks. You too. Bye.

TREVOR: Bye.