

KITCHEN-SIDE MANNER

A LOCAL FOOD BLOGGER USES HER
MEDICAL AND CULINARY EXPERTISE TO
PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVING BY ALYSSA FISHER



Sonali Ruder



Sonali Ruder's website, The Foodie Physician

Everything Sonali Ruder knew about cooking in 2007 came from watching television. Food Network is on 24 hours a day—ideal for a medical resident working awful hours in the emergency room. Before long, what little free time she had was spent whipping up meals in her tiny New York City apartment and competing in cooking competitions.

The term “foodie” is thrown around a lot these days, but to Ruder, a board-certified emergency medicine physician at Broward Health Coral Springs, it’s more than a hashtag on an artfully styled Instagram post—it’s a way of life.

“I’m pretty much obsessed with food,” she says, laughing. “I read every food magazine. I read blogs. I watch cooking shows. [My husband and I] go out to a lot of restaurants.”

In 2009, the Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine graduate enrolled in culinary school, eager to go beyond her as-seen-on-TV cooking education and learn the fundamentals. That year, somewhere between working in the emergency room during the day and attending the Institute of Culinary Education at night, she started a food blog, The Foodie Physician (thefoodiephysician.com), to share recipes with friends and family.

Since then, The Foodie Physician has evolved from a catalog of quick-yet-nutritious recipes for singletons and newlyweds to a resource for families about preventing

disease through proper diet, stocking a healthy kitchen and cooking with your children. Brainstorming and testing new recipes is perhaps her favorite part. “It’s one of the reasons I love cooking: I love to express my creative side,” she says.

When Ruder, 41, was pregnant with her daughter, Sienna (now 4), she had a lot of questions about what she should and shouldn’t eat. Internet searches pulled up a lot of conflicting information, so she did more thorough research on her own, resulting in her 2015 book, *Natural Pregnancy Cookbook*. While reading up on general nutrition and children’s health, she became concerned with the country’s obesity epidemic and the rise of Type 2 diabetes in children. Her follow-up book, *Natural Baby Food*, details baby food recipes and tips on how to introduce flavors and instill healthy eating habits early.

Her husband, Peter, who works in the emergency room at Broward Health Medical Center, makes up the other half of The Foodie Physician. It’s become a business, she says, almost like a full-time job—she has partnered with Whole Foods Market and Bob’s Red Mills, a company known for its whole-grain flour; she’s also become an ambassador for Siggi’s Yogurt, a brand that touts a low-sugar recipe, and the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council. After their ER shifts, Sonali and Peter work in their home on Las Olas Boulevard, where they’ve lived since 2012.

“I do all of the cooking and the food styling, and he does a lot of the photography and almost all the social media,” she says. “We’re a team.”

A SIMPLE PHILOSOPHY

Ruder says she doesn’t believe in diets—healthy eating is a lifestyle. She suggests the following:

- Adhere to a well-balanced diet filled with nutrient-dense, whole foods—foods as close to their natural state as possible, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seafood, nuts and seeds.
- Limit the amount of processed foods.
- Eat in moderation.
- Maintain an active, balanced and fulfilling lifestyle.
- Cook at home as often as possible.
- Enjoy delicious food!

FOR THE PICKIEST OF EATERS

There’s a misconception that baby food has to be bland, Ruder says.

“In a lot of parts of the world, [parents] introduce spices and herbs at a young age,” she explains. “A lot of them have health benefits, too.”

The earlier parents introduce these flavors to their kids, the more likely they will accept them and become better, more adventurous eaters. She doesn’t suggest giving cayenne pepper to a baby, but you can add cinnamon to apple puree, or throw thyme into a pumpkin puree.

Ruder also advises against making meals for each member of the family.

“You should be getting your kids eating the same food as the rest of the family early on,” she says. “It’s less work for you, and then it also teaches them healthy eating habits.”

