

serious nutrition

CRAFTED DAILY  
LOCAL  
SEASONAL  
FRESH



# Healthy Cooking

BY MELANIE HESS



Prior to the discovery of insulin in the 1920s, a diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes was equivalent to that of a terminal illness. Today the disorder is manageable, but not preventable.

When Emily Feikes learned she was one of the few young adults who develop Type 1 diabetes during their mid 20s, she knew some areas of her life would require change. What Feikes never expected was that her diagnosis would serve as the catalyst for a career and passion she had been searching for since high school graduation.

### Life-Altering News

"After the initial shock and grief, I picked myself up and learned all about the health aspect of it," Feikes said. "How could I improve my longevity and avoid the end results of heart disease or possible limb amputations? The answers led to food — food as medicine."

Not only was she concerned with preserving her own life, but she knew not remaining in prime health would make life challenging for her young daughter as well.

"I thought 'I have a kid. I have to take care of her. I've got to figure out how to live well and be healthy,'" Feikes recalled.

Unfortunately, even the diabetic cookbooks she purchased left much to be desired in regards to nutrition. At that point, she enrolled in the culinary program at Collin College.

Through "The Unhealthy Truth," a book she was required to read in a Collin College physical education course, Feikes identified her initial interest in what she refers to as the hand-in-hand nature of nutrition and cooking.

"The book talks about the problem in America," Feikes said. "It starts with our health care and explains that a lot of our health problems are a result of what we are eating and the overconsumption of food, leading to weight gain, which directly relates to a lot of the problems."

In her culinary coursework, Feikes took nutrition and diet therapy and a hands-on healthy cuisine class.

Program chair and professor for the Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Education Karen Musa said that nutrition and diet therapy focuses on nutritional care for patients and clients, including risk screening, diet evaluation, basic diet calculations and documentation.

"Healthy cuisine applies what is taught in courses like nutrition and menu planning



Feikes puts her passion into practice at Patina Green in Downtown McKinney.

to a lab environment," Musa said. "Students learn to adapt basic cooking techniques to lower the fat and caloric content in dishes."

When she first started, Feikes was solely interested in culinary arts. "Then after being exposed to nutrition, I was intrigued," she explained. "I thought about diabetes educators and how they demonstrate with props and tell you what you should and shouldn't eat."

This led to the development of a more refined goal. "I thought, 'There's a difference between telling a person and physically doing it,'" Feikes remembered. "I decided I wanted to incorporate cooking with nutritional awareness. Initially, I wanted to teach people how to cook for themselves. It is cheaper and healthier than going out to eat. Now, I want to teach people how to cook healthy for themselves."

In research about her own condition, Feikes said she also discovered the similarities and differences in the treatments of Types 1 and 2 diabetes.

"With Type 2 diabetes becoming an epidemic in America, something must be done," Feikes said.

Feikes emphasizes that processed foods are addicting. The body cannot get enough.

"If you eat 500 calories of sugary food, it is not going to fill your stomach up like 500 calories of fruits and vegetables would because there are nutrients," Feikes said. "With something like organic cane sugar, that's not as processed, your body has to work more. Your body doesn't have to do a lot of work to consume and digest processed food."

Organic foods typically have less negative qualities than non-organic. Feikes explains that for items like corn and soy, with 90 percent of their American production genetically modified, one should seek to buy the organic (or pesticide-free) product. In addition, products like berries tend to absorb pesticides, making them a good choice to buy organic.

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Feikes admits not everything needs to be organic to be healthy. For example, foods like bananas have a peel, so it does not matter whether they are organic or not. When shopping for meat or dairy, Feikes believes searching for chicken and eggs that aren't given hormones, is much more important than a label that reads "organic."

### Hands-On Experience

With a growing passion for nutrition, Feikes was unwilling to compromise her health values for a paid culinary position. When Musa connected her with the Lyford family's business, Patina Green Home and Market in the McKinney square, she began witnessing first-hand healthy, organic and local cooking in the industry. Feikes describes her job as a place where she can take everything she learned in school and put it into practice.

"I found a remarkable student in Emily," Patina Green Chef Robert Lyford said. "She is driven and motivated. Not only is she a key player in the kitchen, but she has also proven her skills in the business end by assisting in the cost analysis of multiple recipes."

With a range of recognitions for his health-conscious restaurant, Lyford agrees

with Feikes, stressing that nutrition is a key part to the culinary world and should always be considered.

The restaurant kitchen is comprised of only five individuals, including the Lyfords, Feikes and the sous chef. Feikes' focus is the 10 pre-portioned sides that Patina Green makes and serves regularly.

"One of my favorite sides is the beet salad," Feikes said. "It has red beets, roasted, chilled and sliced, with balsamic vinegar, oil, house-made pickled red onion and bleu cheese crumbles."

### Looking Forward

Naturally, Feikes also earned her dietary manager and food protection certification. This certification allows her to work in the food industry directly with a nutritionist. One of the four ways to qualify to sit for the exam is graduating with an accredited culinary degree.

Most recently, Feikes had the opportunity to work at the Texas A&M Agrilife Healthy Cooking School, a role that looks much like the ideal careers she has described. As she prepped everything she would cook for the night, Feikes used veg-



Feikes recommends using organic or pesticide-free foods.

etable scraps to create a flavored, sodium-free and cost-free stock.

"She did a fantastic job explaining her techniques to a group of over 150 people," Musa said. "I was very proud to say that Emily graduated from our program."

Feikes intends to soon begin the master's program in nutrition at Texas Woman's University.

"What intrigues me about culinary arts and nutrition is finding answers," Feikes said. "When I find those answers, I want to share them."

For more information about the Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Education at Collin College, visit [collin.edu/hospitality](http://collin.edu/hospitality).