



## Students are learning how to cook up a feast, thanks to tailor-made digital courses

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By Sudi Pigott

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*Sudi Pigott's son Theo learning to cook at home with Lorna Wing's online course (Photo: Sudi Pigott)*

New university students living away from home for the first time have had a lot to contend with. And they'll have yet another challenge on their plates this month: adapting to cooking for themselves.

Students will have to remain within residential “bubbles” this term, which means that any on-campus dining will be more restricted.

A constant diet of takeaways is not sustainable long-term, so knowing how to shop, cook and eat well within budget is likely to be more important than ever. Fortunately, there are several new affordable and accessible tools for easing the transition and reassuring worried parents.

Kitchen facilities are better than I remember from my time at York University back in the 80s: a Baby Belling with a couple of slow rings, and an oven that barely got warmer than body temperature.

Still, much to the disgust of my fellow students who got squeamish about the bloodied pot defrosting, I had a signature dish of chicken liver stroganoff that friends still recall with a shudder. But it got me plenty of dates and started my love affair with cooking.

Lorna Wing, in her former career once the most fashionable caterer in London, has just launched an online cooking course in response to the challenges her son faced at Sussex University.

“I was shocked at how little equipment they had,” she explains, “and how little space to store ingredients, even how few food shops were close by. And they have limited time between lectures to eat, let alone cook.”

Lorna had initially launched her innovative culinary courses for Duke of Edinburgh’s Award students, inventively utilising WhatsApp, their preferred communication medium. Now she’s casting her net wider, with a greater emphasis on budget ingredients and basic facilities.

Students make a recipe and send three photos of different stages of preparation, giving their comments about any problems they encountered, plus what the finished dish tasted like and an indication of whether they enjoyed it and why (or why not). Lorna gives detailed feedback, lots of encouragement and extra tips.

Each recipe, broadly British, Mediterranean, Asian or Middle Eastern, is based around an inexpensive, nutritious ingredient that is tinned, in a packet or frozen and using mostly dried herbs and spices, with suggestions for substitute ingredients. There are also ideas for how to use up leftovers.

With my son Theo, a relatively recent student, I got cooking. First up, Piccalilli-Spiced Rice, inspired by Meera Sodha’s version in her book *East*. There are precise instructions on rinsing the starch off the basmati rice to ensure the grains stay

separate (plus links to a useful YouTube video to help) and advice to use a fork to fluff up the cooked rice.

The Piccalilli-Spiced Rice proved a real success. The piccalilli with pickled crunchy vegetables in a tangy mustard-turmeric sauce was a revelation to Theo. Simply stirred into rice and topped with yoghurt, mango chutney, Bombay mix and fresh coriander, it made a generous portion. He liked the suggestion of adding in cooked frozen edamame beans.

Equally successful was a spicy pasta sauce based on crunchy peanut butter mixed with garlic, any kind of vinegar, soy sauce, sweet chilli sauce, sesame oil and boiling water. I drizzled the sauce over skewers of yellow pepper, red onion, mushroom and halloumi, which I baked for 20 minutes, keeping some sauce back to heat in a pan. Utterly moreish. I will make it again as a dip for raw vegetables. Besides tasting deliciously savoury, nut butters are high in protein and beneficial fats, so this sauce would help keep students full for longer.

Honor Skelding, 18, who has a deferred place at Birmingham to read chemistry, has signed up for Lorna's Omnivores Course (there's a Plant-Based Course too). She tried the "fakeaway" crispy Chinese hoisin chicken. Top marks for Lorna's tip to pull the chicken skin off the pan-fried thighs and finish it in the oven to crisp it up.

Honor, who was a pesto-pasta-only cook previously, was amazed at how inexpensive the dish was to feed four. "Lorna's instructions are so clear, it almost feels like she's there beside me," she said.



*Lorna in the kitchen with her university student son Charlie*