

In my kitchen ...

PERZEN PATEL

Perzen is happiest when she is at the intersection of cooking food, eating and telling a good story. When she's not working, she is shining a light on New Zealand's diverse food scene through her podcast, *Kiwi Foodcast* and, thanks to the support of Panuku's The Kitchen Project, has been working on the launch of her latest venture Dolly Mumma. Named for her grandmother, it's a range of ready-to-cook pastes based on family recipes handed down through generations. She shares her at-home kitchen essentials with *Be Well*.

My kitchen at home is the place you will always find me. It is my happy space and I am always experimenting with a new recipe or ingredient, or cooking in bulk so that my three boys have enough for the week. My one pet peeve is an unorganised pantry so I'm always going on to my family about putting things back where they found it because I can't cook if my pantry is a mess.

If I could change anything I would have a bigger kitchen with more counter space, and buy a deep freezer. I love to meal-plan and cook things in bulk; it would be great to have more freezer space so I don't have to worry about not having enough meals.

Items that are always in my fridge are curry leaves and coriander because they are my go-to herbs for just about any kind of food I make. I always have a stock of carrots because I hide them in all my kids' meals, and broccoli because my son likes to open the fridge and nibble on it raw. Aside from that, there's always cheese. We're a cheese-loving family.

My pantry is full of all kinds of sauces and spices. I have storage baskets for different kinds of cuisine so my Southeast Asian ingredients like fish sauce and oyster sauce stay there and I have another basket for all my pastas and couscous and then shelves for my Indian spices. Now that I have a Thermomix I make sauces and spice blends myself at home. I do that when the mood gets me, once in a couple of months, and that leaves me with plenty of flavours I can experiment with.



Find one of Perzen's favourite recipes at Eatwell.co.nz

"Do what makes you feel good. Your gut never lies."

My favourite ingredient to cook with is onions. I often find myself cutting a couple before I have decided what I am cooking and they are just so versatile and tasty!

My go-to meal is a bowl of dahl. I love lentils and could have them every night of the week, making different kinds of preparations. Being Parsi, my favourite is Dhandar, made using yellow split pigeon peas, ghee, turmeric, garlic and cumin. If I've been away travelling for a long time or if I am happy or if I am upset, Dhandar is soul food.

I cook at home pretty much every day. While I used to love dining out, going out for a meal with small kids is often a big mission. During lockdown I experimented making most of the takeaways I love to eat at home. Now I know how to make a good steak and pulled pork, I can't imagine going out and paying a lot for it.

My most used appliance is hands down my Thermomix. I use it for milling spices, making coconut milk, soups, kneading bread dough and to make the most delicious desserts.

My least-used is my stovetop. I make most of my food in the Thermomix or the oven and when I am not using either one of those it's my deep fryer I love.

A kitchen gadget everyone should own is a really good oven. Or maybe even two! We have a 1.5 oven in our kitchen and I often have something cooking on all levels.

A spice I can't live without is a blend of cumin and coriander seeds. I love putting it in everything; it adds a lovely flavour even in European or Italian food. Another discovery, though not technically a spice, is Worcestershire sauce. When I taste a dish and feel like it's missing something but I can't put my finger on it, I generally add both of these ingredients and it always does the job.

My advice for living well is to make time for the things you love. Whether that is cooking, writing or in this tired mum's case, taking a nap!

● To find out more visit bawibride.com or tune into Perzen's podcast *Kiwi Foodcast*.

BEING WELL

Mind your mind

Shaun Robinson, chief executive of the Mental Health Foundation, has suffered from bipolar disorder his whole life and is a big advocate for positive mental health. "Mental Health Awareness Week is about trying to remind people to pay attention to their own mental health, wherever they are on the continuum," says Shaun. "Our aim is to give people activities and experiences that can improve mental fitness."

Based on the Maori approach to holistic wellbeing, Te Whare Tapa Whā, Mental Health Awareness Week, which starts today, focuses on a different element of wellbeing over five days.

"We look to give people practical tips that are shown to improve mood and wellbeing," explains Shaun.

Five elements to mental wellbeing:

1 Whānau — is about connecting with others, taking time to reach out to people. Organise a morning tea, invite a friend to go for a walk.

2 Wairua — looks at what uplifts our spirits. For some it is religion, for others it is connecting with nature, or taking notice of the little things, breathing exercises, or writing in a gratitude diary.

3 Whenua — is our connection to the earth. There is evidence that even looking at a photo of a natural environment affects our brain chemistry, releasing endorphins.

4 Tinana — focus on your body. Research says that just one hour of moderate exercise is beneficial to mental health. It can also be about what we eat or our sleep patterns.

5 Hinengaro — healthy thoughts, healthy mind. It doesn't have to be deep meditation, it can be colouring, crafting, playing music... It is anything that helps you focus on being in the moment.

● Mental Health Awareness Week runs from September 21-27. To find out more go to Mhaw.nz.

SHOP LOCAL



A visit to Scarecrow

Nestled between Wild Wheat's flagship bakery and Ivy & Bean cafe in a building named Tramstop on Mt Eden Rd is the newly opened second Scarecrow Grocer store. Scarecrow's flagship store in Auckland's CBD opened in 2014, largely out of necessity when owners Alison and Paul Dyson struggled to find the fresh, locally-sourced foods they loved.

Scarecrow's new offering aims to showcase local artisan goods such as organic meats, produce, eggs, dairy, quality grocery items, fresh house-made deli and ready meals. Find gift baskets, an in-house florist, and New Zealand wines and craft beers in store.

● Scarecrow Grocer is open 7 days, 8am-6pm, Mt Eden Road, Mt Eden.