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THE ONE ABOUT BEANS

Week two of our No Meat May challenge has definitely felt more “real life” than week one. This week has been about juggling busy evenings, unexpected disruptions, and sticking to our goal as best we can.

When time is tight

Monday night tested us straight away. We needed something fast, we were back from work late and (with after-school activities for one of the children), we had 30 minutes to get something on the table before heading out again. This meant we had no energy for experimenting or spending ages in the kitchen. So we turned to a classic: beans on toast.

We turned to a classic ... beans on toast!

We used homemade brown bread, which meant together with the beans it provided a complete protein, something I’m becoming much more aware of as we eat less meat. It was a great reminder that simple meals can still be nutritious and satisfying.

Preparedness pays off

Tuesday brought something unexpected, an emergency trip to A&E, my son hurt his arm and needed an X-ray. Thankfully, nothing was broken but he did sustain a fracture. Under normal circumstances, this would have meant relying on takeaway or ultra-processed convenience food. But the one thing I did take from last week was the importance of planning. At the weekend, I had batch-cooked and frozen some meals in family-sized portions so dinner was already sorted. When we got home, we could just heat and eat! It removed what could have been a very stressful end to an already difficult day; definitely a habit I want to keep going beyond this month.

National Bean Week

This week I’ve been leaning more into dried beans and pulses, which feels especially fitting as it’s **National Bean Week**. I read that the average person in the UK eats around one portion of beans per week and we are on track for six portions this week alone! And honestly, it’s been a bit of a revelation:

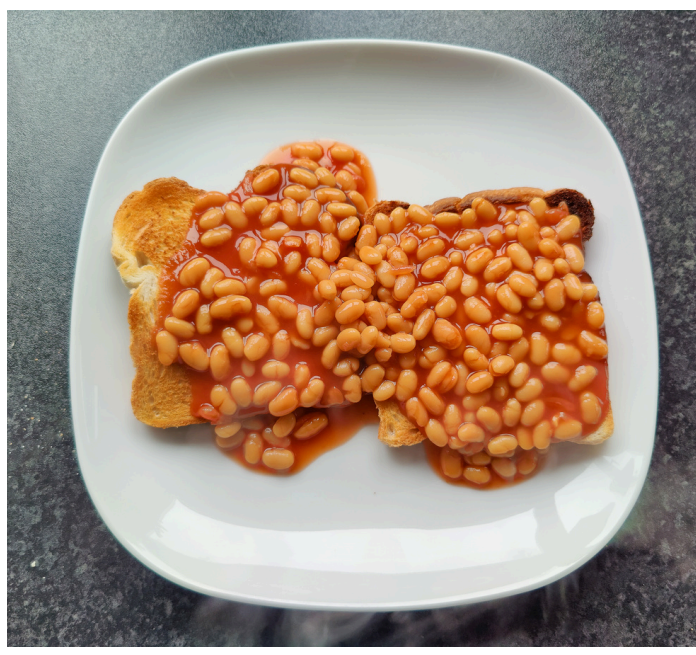
- *They’re packed with protein and fibre*
- *They’re significantly cheaper than meat*
- *They’re incredibly versatile*

From quick meals to batch cooking, beans are starting to feel like a cornerstone rather than a substitute. You can use tinned beans or lentils, which are great as no soaking is required. I am trying to use dried beans as they are more economical. I also have a pressure cooker, which means cooking them, ready to use in dishes, is quick and easy.

THE CLASSIC

A family favourite, beans on toast ticks all the boxes:

- Quick
- Cheap
- Minimal washing up
- Made from store-cupboard staples!



Beans on toast

NO MEAT MAY BLOG #2


‘Like Meat’ sausages


Thai style butternut squash curry

Not all veggie sausages are equal

My takeaway for the week was that not all vegetarian sausages are created equally. The ones we tried were questionable so I reached out to a few vegetarian friends for recommendations, and now have a shortlist of trusted brands to try next time we’re craving sausage and mash. It’s been really helpful to tap into other people’s experience rather than relying on trial and error alone.

Looking beyond “swap” cooking

I’ve also realised I don’t enjoy most heavily processed meat substitutes. So instead, I’ve been exploring cuisines where vegetarian food is part of the culture, rather than an adaptation. With my love of cooking this has been really exciting. I’ve found some great looking Chinese and Indian recipes that focus on vegetables, pulses, and bold flavours and aren’t trying to imitate meat, but instead celebrating plant-based ingredients in their own right. I’m looking forward to trying more of these in the coming weeks.

A current favourite

Tonight’s dinner is a firm favourite in our house: a Japanese vegetable pancake (**okonomiyaki**). It can be served with meat or seafood, but works well as a vegetarian meal, which is how we have always had it. What I love about okonomiyaki:

- *It’s completely adaptable*
- *It works with whatever vegetables you have to hand*
- *It’s a brilliant way to use up white cabbage (a nice change from coleslaw!)*


Okonomiyaki


An Okonomiyaki bar in Tokyo where you make it yourself

The unexpected wins

One of the biggest surprises so far has been the impact on our food budget and time:

- *Our food spend is down by about a third*
- *Cooking is generally quicker as vegetables simply don’t take as long as meat to cook*

Week two reflections

This week has felt less about “trying something new” and more about making it work in real life with busy schedules, curveballs, and all. The biggest takeaways so far:

- *Simple meals are often the best ones*
- *Preparation really matters*
- *Beans and pulses are more powerful than I realised*
- *Exploring globally-inspired vegetarian dishes feels much more natural than relying on substitutes*

On to week three and hopefully a bit more experimenting, depending on what life throws at us!