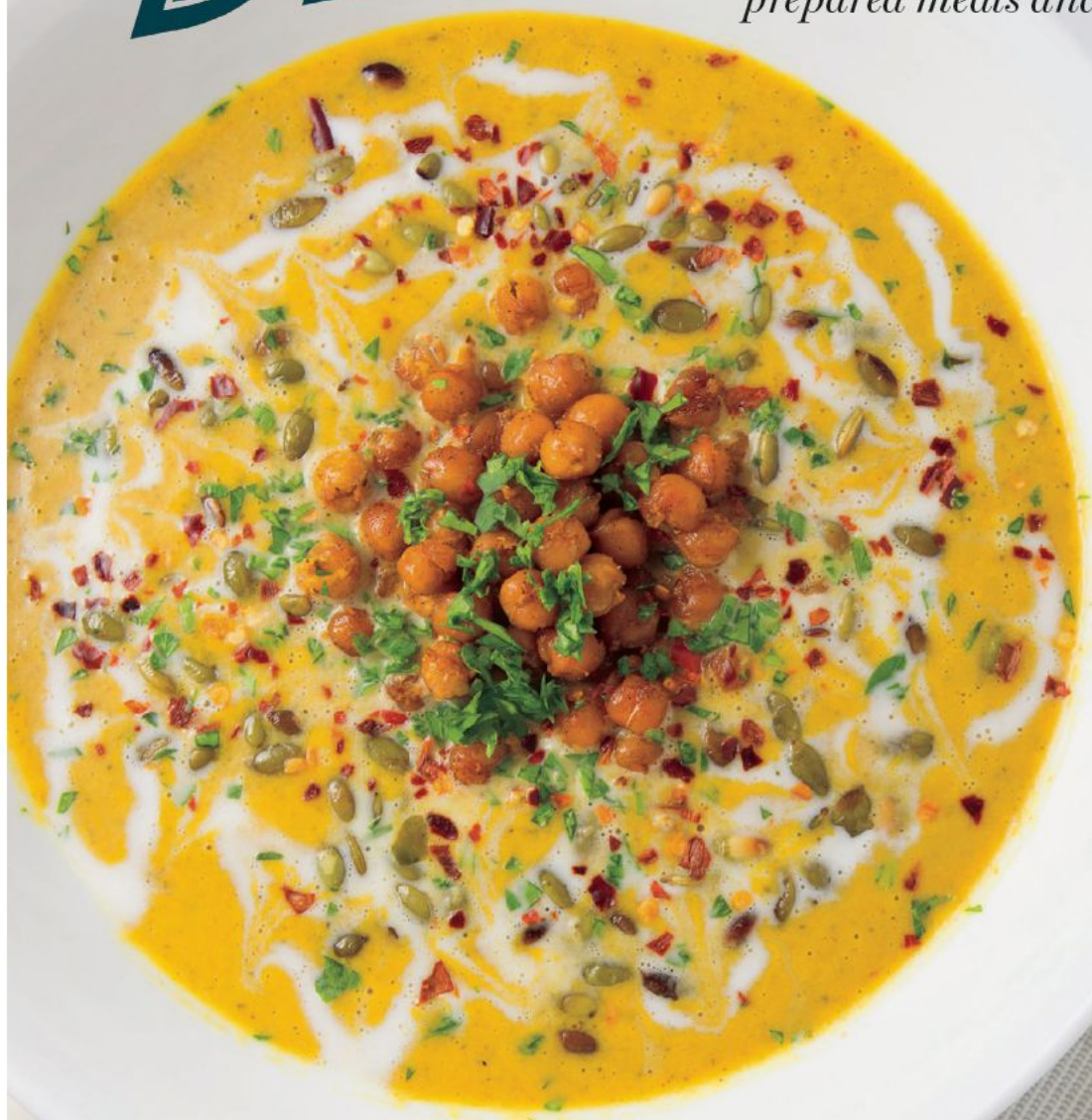




# DINNER DELIVERED

*Local entrepreneurs  
put a healthy spin on meal kits,  
prepared meals and personal chef services.*

BY EILEEN KEIGHLEY



Curry soup by Taylor Made Cuisine



Far left: Taylor DeCosta, co-owner of Taylor Made Cuisine meal delivery service; Culinary by Design's Italian balsamic chicken (middle) and founder Stephanie Miller (right)

**M**ove over pizza delivery and forget about picking up fast food after work: Entrepreneurs and Newport Beach chefs are ready to deliver high-quality meals right to your door. They come in different forms, from boxes of ingredients to ready-to-heat meals and personal chefs who prepare your dinners and even do the washing up.

What's driving the change? Better health is at the heart of it. Some use meal prep for weight loss as special diets touted in books and online can be difficult to follow. Meal prep companies offer food options tailored to most diets promoted in popular books—from "The Plant Paradox" to Whole30 to keto—and work by delivering well-portioned, flavorful and controlled meals.

A lot of people with serious medical conditions also use meal prep companies when undergoing treatment for medical issues. For example, cancer treatment can be grueling and eating well is critical. Patients often don't know what to eat or don't have the energy to cook well for themselves.

Sometimes though, it's just about lifestyle. It seems everyone is busier than ever and, although parents want to serve the healthiest food for themselves and their kids, they often don't have time to cook. Making it even more difficult, family members typically have different food preferences and allergies to consider when planning a meal, which makes it complicated. Many are saying "no" to fast food and restaurant deliveries,

but, at the same time, they want food that everyone enjoys and ticks the wellness box.

### Ingredient-Driven

If you enjoy cooking and trying new recipes but want the hassle taken out of shopping, then meal-ingredient boxes are a good option. There are many national companies out there: Blue Apron, HelloFresh and Plated, to name a few. Designed to expand your cooking repertoire, recipes change weekly and you can buy into a plan (individual or family size) or order individual dishes, but don't expect too much customization. However, there are also meal boxes that meet certain dietary restrictions, such as the vegan Purple Carrot or Green Chef, an all-organic service that offers keto, paleo, vegetarian and vegan plans.

Most companies provide instructions that are easy to follow and include pictures. However, some of the recipes have multiple steps and involve more prep work than may be expected.

Consumers often use ingredient boxes to provide variety and nutritional balance, but Newport Beach registered dietitian April Murray of OC Nutrition Coaching says to consider each dish carefully. "The nutritional content of foods will change depending on how the item is prepared," she says. For example, if a lot of the food is fried, "this would be not as optimal from a nutritional standpoint."

### Good Meals Delivered

In between meal ingredient boxes and a personal chef, you'll find prepared meal delivery services with an increasing amount of personalization. Essentially, meals are delivered once a week and stored in your fridge ready to be heated up. There are many options, some offering little or no personalization to others that work with a variety of dietary requirements.

Taylor DeCosta, co-owner of Taylor Made Cuisine, sees her company as a boutique meal service. Trained at Orange Coast College, she has always worked in the Newport area. Starting as a private chef, she moved into meal preparation for a discerning group of clients who are busy but also "following specific diets, and they want to eat that way but don't necessarily know how to prepare it for themselves." Her growing company now employs eight chefs. Working alongside dietitians, nutritionists and doctors, she can provide meals for specific diets and restrictions including vegetarian, vegan, pescatarian, keto, paleo and more.

The business offers more than 100 items that cover breakfasts to dinners and snacks in between. Clients can choose a weekly program or just buy add-on items like carrot and creamy kale dip or almond grabbers and the house-made gluten-free granola bars. Entrees range from almond chicken to beef ragu, Cajun-butter steak, fajitas, lamb meatballs, chicken curry, saffron shrimp, vegan jambalaya and more.

LEFT: JERRICK O'CONNOR; MIDDLE AND RIGHT: STEPHANIE MILLER; ILLUSTRATION: DRAWLAB19/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Nutrition and taste are her No. 1 priority: “I try all the food. ... Nothing is created in the kitchen without me tasting it,” DeCosta says. And her approach is flexible. “We have several clients who want to pick their food versus me pick their food. ... We have an a la carte with add-ons. ... Basically, we work with them to provide what’s right for them.”

Operating a gluten-free kitchen, Taylor Made sources produce from different vendors, ensuring line-caught, wild fish and grass-fed meats (tenderized in the kitchen). If a client wants bread, it is bought and delivered independently of the company’s kitchen. Taylor Made is also big on nuts, vegetables, seeds and often uses nut butters in cooking. DeCosta says variety is key in her menus. Delivery comes weekly on Sundays. Personalizing orders is welcomed. “Clients send us their list and we see if we can help,” DeCosta says.

Another Newport-based company, Culinary by Design, was started by Stephanie Miller during the recession. A culinary arts graduate, she began providing meals to individuals who needed a private chef as a “necessity” for health reasons. She continues to work with nutritionists and doctors as needed to address specific diets and needs. She



Lemon bars by Taylor Made Cuisine, a local meal delivery service

limits the number of clients, works mostly by referral and spends time getting to know them.

“I am not for the masses. I customize to what my clients want,” Miller explains. “For example, I have an athlete on a regimented diet who doesn’t like spice, especially on game day. His wife, however, likes spice, so I make the same dish but hers

[is] spicier.”

Culinary by Design creates dishes like tomato soup with herbs and goat cheese; Chinese chicken salad with mixed baby greens, chicken, jicama, orange segments and toasted almonds, all tossed with ginger dressing; wild salmon with pesto, tarragon butter or citrus glaze; classic



Registered dietitian  
April Murray

## NUTRITION MATTERS

Newport Beach registered dietitian April Murray provides the low-down on using meal prep services.

### Newport Beach Magazine: What should you keep in mind when choosing a meal planning service?

April Murray: Ensure the company uses the best ingredients and has your health at the heart of their meals. Find out if they use organic/grass-fed/pasture-raised/wild-caught ingredients.

If you have dietary restrictions or food preferences, can they work to [meet] them—for example soy-free, gluten-free, dairy-free? I [also] like to work with companies with good customer service and who are easy to communicate with.

[And,] does it taste good? I love eating healthy, don’t get me wrong, but if I’m being served subpar tasting food, then what is the point?

### Are there nutritional no-nos that consumers should avoid?

AM: Avoid companies that prepare low-calorie, low-fat meals—for example steamed veggies, plain brown rice and grilled chicken breast. It will get old very fast, and you won’t be getting enough healthy fats or nutrients. ... [Also,] avoid companies that skimp on vegetables, ... [which] should make up 50% of our

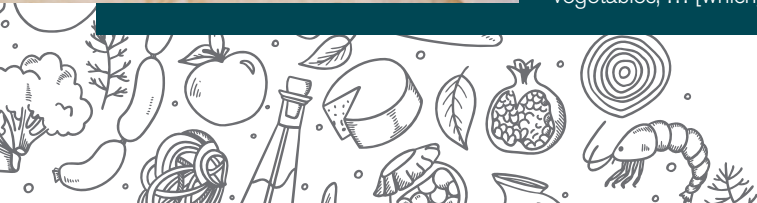
plate. Find a company who knows how to make the vegetables taste good while retaining their nutrients.

Tip: If the meals come in plastic containers, always remove food and place in a ceramic or glass dish before heating in the microwave. This will reduce your exposure [to] ... BPA and phthalates, which are bad for the body.

### What’s your advice for having a balanced diet while on a meal plan?

AM: A balanced diet should include adequate amounts of protein, a diversity of fibers, vegetables—tons of them—and healthy fats. If you notice, for instance, that the meals tend to be lacking in healthy fats (think avocado, walnuts, olive oil, etc.), we would recommend supplementing those into your diet. You could snack on a handful [of] almonds or top the plain steamed vegetables with olive oil. ...

[With] a quality meal prep service, ... the company will be sure to incorporate a healthy balance of nutrients. ... When I order the spicy apricot chicken, it comes with a side of roasted sweet potatoes and sauteed mixed vegetables. This is a perfect meal: It contains protein, fat and high-fiber carbohydrates.





Whole Health Everyday owner Rebecca Clubb (middle) and one of the chefs, Corey Head (top left); scones (bottom left) and dishes (right) that the private chef business will make and serve or place in containers for clients to reheat throughout the week.

chicken pot pie; or Italian chicken breast with balsamic glaze atop a bed of pappardelle noodles, sprinkled with Parmesan shavings and arugula. Even desserts are available, from creme brulee to cheesecake and chocolate soufflé.

Today, Miller's client base is broad, from professional athletes to families who don't have time to cook and want healthy meals, to individuals wanting to lose weight and eat healthier. While her approach is collaborative, many just don't want to think about it, she says, and leave the menu planning to her.

Miller delivers weekly, typically on a Monday, using labeled Pyrex containers that can easily go from refrigerator to oven. Fish is prepared fresh to be eaten on delivery day. Miller likes to blanch and then quickly roast or grill her vegetables so they aren't over cooked. She says her meals feature lower sodium and not as much oil or sugar as many other options.

**At Your Service**

Driven by her own health issues, Rebecca Clubb created Whole Health Everyday, a Newport-based personal chef business offering a truly personal approach and heavily focused on nutrition, which aligns with a change she has seen when it comes to healthy eating.

"SoCal has always been very health-conscious and an active lifestyle type of place," Clubb says. "It

is a part of the country with very fit, beautiful people. ... [I've seen an] increase in business the last couple years though, with people being more concerned about health and wellness than ever before."

Clubb notes that there has been a big uptick in people learning that they have food sensitivities and other health issues, leading them to change what they eat; before, people mostly modified their diets to lose weight, she says.

Clubb's clients include families, busy professionals, people with specific health needs, athletes and even college students who struggle with campus food. She has regular calls from cancer patients looking for nutritional help during treatment and works directly with doctors and dietitians. Clubb only employs chefs who know as much about nutrition as creating tasty food and sees this as setting them apart from the competition. "Our chefs get constant training for nutrition," Clubb says. For example, July's speaker was a cancer coach."

Clients often choose to start with a lifestyle assessment created by Clubb and chef Brett Hickey, who has a bachelor's degree in culinary nutrition. Clubb sees Hickey's involvement as critical. "He goes through the questions and recommends a specific plan," she says. "... He has worked with all the diets and can communicate his knowledge with the chefs."

Every new client gets a home visit to discuss likes and dislikes, restrictions and lifestyle. "We ask

what they want, even where they want the shopping done," she says. "The chefs will shop at any market the client wants. We have one client who is kosher and so the chef goes into LA to special kosher markets."

On the scheduled day, it could be once a week or more, the chef will go into the client's home, cook the meal and serve it or prepare several meals and stock the fridge for the week with labeled packages ready to be heated up. Or, if requested, the chef can prep everything for the client to cook. Accommodations are made for a variety of circumstances.

For example, Clubb says, "We made nutrient-filled shakes for the customer who was losing her appetite and provided bamboo cutlery to a cancer patient customer who was struggling with [the] metallic taste from their silverware."

Some of the tasty dishes prepared by Whole Health Everyday chefs include Japanese curry; fajita bowls; vegetable pad thai with kale noodles; spaghetti squash baked ziti with vegan ricotta and white beans; and cauliflower steak with pine nut and black truffle sauce.

For some, the joy of not having to shop and prepare food cannot be overstated. For others, the authority of dietitians and their personal scrutiny of healthy eating is a relief. The growth of this culinary sector is a testament to the importance people are putting on how they eat and the recognition of food as the center of a healthy lifestyle. NBM

BOTTOM LEFT: LASHAUNTE WADE; ILLUSTRATION: DRAWLAB19/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM