

The background image shows three people in various yoga or stretching poses on a grassy field at sunset. The sky is a warm orange and yellow, and the silhouettes of the people are dark against the bright background. The title 'Why “Perfect” Eating Backfires' is overlaid in large white text.

# Why “Perfect” Eating Backfires

For so many people trying to eat healthy, each meal and snack becomes an exercise in following rules and getting every detail right. “Clean” eating, ultra-processed food warnings, ingredient fear, and endless “better” versions of foods people already eat start to crowd out common sense.

When that happens, eating stops being intuitive. It becomes something you have to manage carefully, like one wrong move could cancel out your effort to be healthy.

That kind of pressure doesn't lead to better decisions. It leads to all-or-nothing thinking, where one “imperfect” choice turns into giving up for the rest of the day. This is where the well-intentioned idea of perfect eating breaks down.

Lasting health comes from patterns that hold up over time, not from getting every meal exactly right. A meal doesn't have to be “clean,” grass-fed, or gluten-free to count. It just needs to be a reasonable choice that fits into the bigger picture.

In real life, eating well means meals based heavily on whole plant foods, enough food to feel satisfied, and the ability to adapt when plans change. That may sound underwhelming compared to the promise of doing everything “right.” But it works because it leaves room for real life, rather than falling apart the moment something isn't ideal.

If being healthy starts to feel like one wrong choice could cancel everything, that's a sign the rules have taken over. Common sense leaves space for judgment and reason, allows for tradeoffs, and keeps you moving forward.

Does perfection creep into your thoughts around food? See if any of this sounds familiar:

- You spend more time debating what to eat than actually eating.
- One “wrong” choice makes the rest of the day feel pointless.
- You skip a meal because the options available aren't “good enough.”
- You hold out for the ideal choice and end up overeating later.
- You feel like you need to start over rather than just move forward.

Here's a simple reset you can try this week: Instead of asking, “Is this the healthiest choice?” ask, “Will this still support my goals?” That shift alone tends to lead to calmer decisions, fewer extremes, and more consistency over time. This is ultimately what leads to adding years to life and life to years. Eating well isn't about meeting a standard. It's about building habits that fit your life.

For those who tend to seek perfection, it may help to remember this: eating well is not something you can break with one choice. No single meal makes or undoes your health. What matters is what you do next, not whether the last decision was optimal.

# Lemon-Garlic Orzo with Spinach and Parmesan



Orzo is a rice-imposter pasta (rice impasta?) - it looks like rice but you cook it like any other pasta and use it in the same way. This is the kind of dish that shows up in Italian kitchens because it works. This is comfort food at its best: just pasta, olive oil, garlic, greens, and cheese (or plant-based cheese/nutritional yeast).

## Ingredients (serves 3-4):

- 1½ cups dry orzo
- Salt\*
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- 4 packed cups spinach or baby kale, roughly chopped
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plant-based parm, or nutritional yeast
- Black pepper
- Optional add-ins (use what you have and love): Cherry tomatoes, white beans, olives, fresh herbs, sauteed onions, etc.

## Instructions:

1. Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil. Cook the orzo according to package directions until tender. Reserve ½ cup of the cooking water, then drain.
2. While the orzo cooks, warm the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes, if using, and cook just until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
3. Add the spinach and cook until just wilted. Stir in the cooked orzo, lemon zest, lemon juice, and a splash of the reserved pasta water to loosen everything.
4. Remove from heat. Stir in the parmesan or nutritional yeast, season with black pepper, and adjust salt as needed. Add more pasta water if you want it silkier.
5. Serve warm.

\*Note: If you're on a low-sodium diet, skip the salt, go light on the cheese, and season to taste.