

This month Greg and I were talking about how sometimes cooking itself can feel like a cure - when it turns out well and you feed yourself or others something delicious, and also when the process itself feels therapeutic in some way, even if only momentarily. It's incredibly personal as to when those moments might happen for a person. The kitchen and cooking can also be really stressful for so many reasons. For me - i think my calmest moments in the kitchen might be when i'm cooking with dough. It might be to do with the simplicity of dough recipes (flour + water at the most basic). They feel within my control, hard to mess up. But also it's definitely to do with the way dough feels in your hand - the way it changes from a mess of separate ingredients to something smooth and pliable and satisfying to hold.

I know this recipe from memory because i probably make it a few times a week. I often have a ball of this dough in the fridge, and it reassures me that i can make a meal in a couple of minutes - it can be a pizza dough or i might have it with leftovers or a dip or just on its own drizzled with some oil and garlic or herbs or sprinkled with cheese.

If you have a food processor the whole process is v quick, but if not, then you will get your hands into this very sticky dough. It's definitely a dough that feels like it has a life of it's own, and all you can do is be both firm and gentle with it - you stretch and fold it to build it's strength, you tuck it into a neat ball to prove, you prod it into shape, you try not to tear it as you lift it into the hot pan. I find the whole process so satisfying!

There are countless recipes for flatbreads, so many traditions and variations. This is just my (family's) current staple one - i think it probably started as a pizza dough recipe off the back of the yeast packet, but every time we've made it we changed something slightly - the temp of the water, the amount of water, the amount of yeast, trying to make it a bit tastier, a bit quicker to make, a bit fluffier and chewier. We've stopped changing it for now so I guess we're happy with it.

A quick flatbread

Makes 4 breads

250 g strong bread flour

200 g warm water - NOT hot, just pleasantly lukewarm

1 level tsp salt (or less to taste, as this makes them fairly salty)

5g fast action yeast - or roughly half a packet if you have the sachets

Mix flour water and yeast and salt in a bowl until shaggy dough forms - it is a really wet dough.

The moisture in the dough makes a delicious, chewy bread. But it's very sticky - so when handling it, coat your hands, surface/bowls in oil. It's also too wet to knead in the normal way so you have 2 options:

Food processor: The original recipe for this dough uses a food processor to knead it. If you have one - great! Using the dough blade, whizz for about 30 seconds, scrape down the sides and whizz for another 30 secs. Tip into an oiled bowl and leave to prove for 20 mins. Easy!

By hand: Using a wooden spoon mix vigorously for a couple of minutes. Tip/scrape into a clean oiled bowl. With oiled hands, stretch each side of the dough out and slap it into the middle - this helps build up the gluten. Flip over the ball of dough and leave to rest, covered with a tea towel, for 10 mins. Stretch the dough once more, and leave for a further 10 mins. You can do this once more, or if you're hungry, get straight to cooking.

Heat a heavy bottomed pan on the stove - you want it really hot. Turn on your grill to high

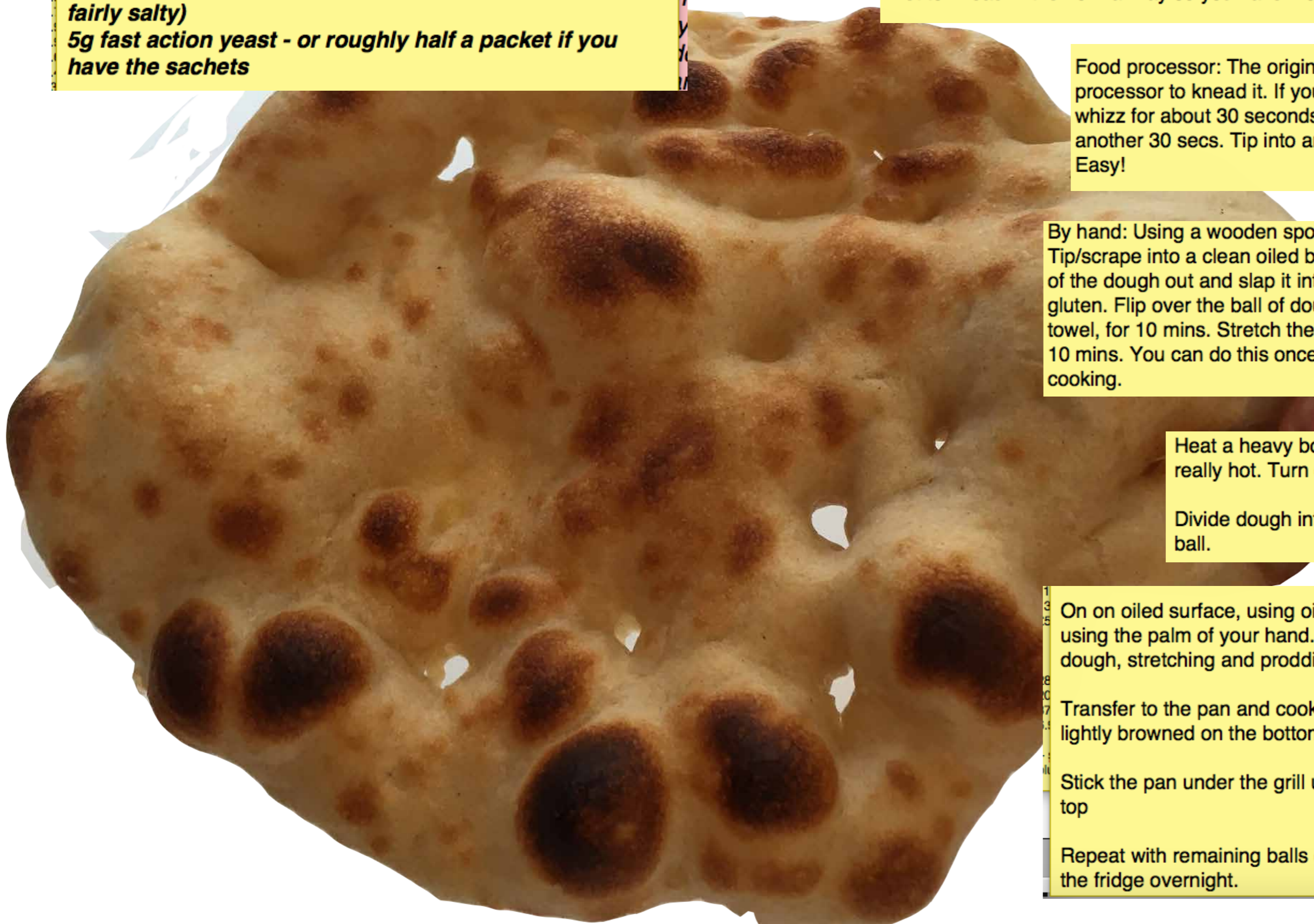
Divide dough into four pieces and shape each into a ball.

On an oiled surface, using oiled hands, flatten a piece of dough, using the palm of your hand. With your fingers tips, poke at the dough, stretching and prodding it into a round a 15-20cm circle.

Transfer to the pan and cook for a couple of minutes until it gets lightly browned on the bottom

Stick the pan under the grill until the bread puffs and browns on top

Repeat with remaining balls of dough. Dough keeps really well in the fridge overnight.



Eat your bread plain, wrap around some meat, fish or roasted veg, dip in a dip or top with:

Olive Oil + chopped herbs (eg. rosemary, thyme, oregano)

Olive Oil + salt/chilli/lemon zest

Greg style: Poached rhubarb + sour cream + honey + thyme

Simmer: 500g Rhubarb (chopped), 300g Sugar, thumb size piece of ginger (grated) + water to half cover the rhubarb in the pan, until rhubarb is tender.

Garlic butter - warm a tablespoon of butter with half a clove of minced/ crushed/grated garlic. Drizzle onto bread whilst hot

Butter + whole toasted spices (eg. cumin seed, fennel seed)

If you want to go full pizza:

Warm a glug of olive oil in a small pan. Smash a whole, unpeeled clove of garlic with the palm of your hand. Remove peel and fry for a couple of minutes until fragrant. Add a dollop of passata and stir till combined with the oil. Season.

Transfer a circle of dough into hot pan (as per recipe). Spread the dough with a spoonful of tomato sauce (use the back of the spoon). Add mozzarella or other cheese, and any other toppings.

As soon as the base of the bread is nicely browning, transfer to grill until the cheese is fully melted.