

#181 - The Instant Pot Episode

Hey, y'all! Welcome to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 181 - the Instant Pot episode. This has been a long time coming, so get ready. If you just bought an Instant Pot for Prime Day or are thinking about it when Cyber Monday rolls around, this episode can be your starter kit on how to think about and use the Instant Pot.

First, I want to tell you about something fun. It's about jewelry. I wear jewelry pretty much from one place - Wind Blown Jewelry. It's jewelry that's legit made for people who don't like or wear jewelry. And it's perfect. There is this one pair of earrings that I wear a lot that I get asked about every single time I wear them. They're open gold circles that lay flush against your earlobe. They're small enough to feel casual but not so small that they don't feel special. Rachel and her team over at Wind Blown just know how to create jewelry that works. Anyway, these earrings are called the Grateful Studs, and they're discontinued. Which makes me sad to say every time somebody asks about them. However, Rachel said, "What if we make the Gratefals available again for a short time for your audience since they ask about them all the time?" Because yes, y'all go to the Wind Blown people and ask about these earrings because I think you know they'll be your new favorite earrings if you can just get your hands on them. Well good news, the Grateful studs are available starting today for just a few weeks for you to snatch up, and then they're legit going away. Like even more away than a Disney vault movie back in the days before Disney Plus. These would make such great holiday gifts too, so click on the link on my profile to go get a pair or two of Grateful Studs before they're gone for good. I promise you these will become your new favorite earrings, and I'm glad Rachel brought them back just for you! Like, legitimately just for you. These are basically Lazy Genius earrings, and I'm here for it. A link is in the show notes so you can check them out.

Okay, let's pivot to the Instant Pot! Here's what we're going to go through today: what the Instant Pot is great for, what it's not great for, how to start using one including my favorite tools and resources, and my own personal Instant Pot rhythm. Because here's the thing: not everybody needs an Instant Pot, and everyone that does have one uses it differently, for different types of recipes and different speeds of regularity. Plus remember this from my book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, the principle of Putting Everything In Its Place? You can't put something in its place until it has a place. An Instant Pot is a fairly large appliance that needs a place to go, so a critical part of deciding whether it's a good call for you to get one is if you have a place to put it that works. Don't buy stuff unless you know where it's going to go. That's the sneaky secret way a Lazy Genius keeps his or her house from going to pot; don't get something unless you know where it will go and keep putting it back in its place.

Okay, so first, what is an Instant Pot great for? It is great for anything that requires cooking where the heat is contained or anything that requires liquid to cook. Think about any recipe you make that you put a lid on or that uses a decent amount of liquid to cook - soups and stews and chilis, a pot of rice or barley or quinoa, vegetables that you usually steam on the stove, braised short ribs or a pot roast, baked chicken and rice dishes that go in a casserole dish that you put

in the oven, pasta... the list is pretty long. Those kinds of recipes or meals or ingredients are fantastic in the Instant Pot. Another way of thinking about it is any recipe you would never want to dry out. The Instant Pot basically eliminates dried out, tough final dishes. And I'm not trying to make you feel dumb, but nobody ever actually explained to me what an Instant Pot does, so I'm going to tell you what I wish someone had told me.

An Instant Pot is a pressure cooker. That means it uses high pressure and the liquid inside it to cook your food quickly. It basically is like rocket fuel for steaming, boiling, stewing, and braising and takes no time compared to on the stove. Depending on the model you get (and I'll link to mine in the show notes), it can basically operate as a pressure cooker and a slow cooker and a rice cooker and a yogurt maker. It knows how to manage time and liquid and pressure to quickly cook food without it getting tough. It's kind of magical actually.

So for example, we love Japanese curry rice in my house. It's my husband's favorite meal that he grew up on as a kid, and all of my kids range from tolerating it to loving it. The Instant Pot version of it is on the website and in the show notes if you want to check it out, but before I adapted it for the Instant Pot, I'd just cook it in a Dutch oven on the stove. Works great, but it takes 3-4 hours to get the meat tender. Easily. So it's kind of a half a day thing you have to plan to be home for. Plus with a lot of braised dishes, you have to babysit the pot a bit because you always want to make sure there's enough water to keep the meat from drying out but not too much that it just boils the meat and also you have to watch the heat that it's consistent, and while I do love the process of braising and still do it sometimes, that doesn't work all the time. Sometimes you need to pull out the Instant Pot and have curry rice ready in less than an hour rather than in four. So it's great for recipes and cooking that require closed moist cooking, and it's great for people who like those kinds of foods and who also could use a bit of a timesaver.

Now, here's what the Instant Pot is not great for. It is not for recipes and cooking approaches that require high open exposed heat. Think about sauteing and grilling and roasting. Foods that need to be spread out and get zapped with high heat to get crispy or caramelized or anything like that should not be cooked in the instant pot. This is not an appliance that will be a stand-in for every piece of cookware you have. It's if you're Dutch oven and soup pot and slow-cooker and rice cooker all had a really smart nerdy baby, and skillets and sheet pans did not contribute to its DNA.

Now there is a saute function on the Instant Pot, and I use it often but only as the first step of a couple in using the Instant Pot as its best self. Like browning the beef for the curry rice first to develop a little flavor but then adding in the liquid and vegetables to actually cook it. So if you're primarily a stir-fry, stuff on the grill, sheet pan person, you might not really use the Instant Pot enough to justify its cost or even more than that, the space it takes up. It doesn't work for everyone or for every recipe. Not everything should be made into an Instant Pot recipe. It's kind of like pumpkin flavored stuff during fall. Just because you can put pumpkin in something doesn't mean you should.

Okay, so let's say you're like yes this is an appliance for me. I cook oatmeal and rice and beans and soup and chicken-and-rice dishes and all of that stuff you just mentioned all the time, and yes I could use some time saving in the kitchen! This is an appliance for me!

Now what? How do you get started? Well, first depending on when you're listening to this, Black Friday has historically been an excellent time to get an Instant Pot. The model I have is maybe a hundred dollars on Amazon on a regular day, but on Black Friday it's been as low as \$60 which is great.

Also, let's do a quick huddle on how to decide whether or not to purchase something like this, how to justify the cost. Everyone has their own way to decide if they're going to spend almost a hundred dollars on an appliance when they already have a slow cooker and a rice cooker and a Dutch Oven and why do I actually need this? This is a valid question, and I applaud you're asking it. Here's how I look at stuff like that. Let's say I think I'm going to use the Instant Pot three times a month just as an arbitrary number. That's 36 times a year. Assuming that this puppy saves me some time by half and sanity by even more, plus this is a great appliance for getting other people to help make dinner because it's as easy as dumping stuff into a bowl and pushing a button, and assuming I spent full price on it for the sake of argument and math, that's less than three bucks a meal in a year. If somebody walked into my house and said, "Hi there. I'd like to speed up your dinner making, I'd like to help you breathe easier, and I'd like to help your family members share some of the dinner-making load with you. I can do this for you about once a week for an extra three dollars" I would throw my money at this person as hard as I could. And that's just for a single year at less than one meal a week. And I know a lot of people who use their Instant Pot several times a week. So that's how I figure out if anything is worth it to buy or one of the ways. Spread it out over time and see if you're willing to pay however many bucks or pennies per experience.

Okay, so getting started. You've bought it. You've opened the box and are so ready. But then you see all the buttons. And you read warnings about pressure and you're like wait is this a time capsule or something that fell from space? I think there's no greater pleasure plummet than anticipation of a small appliance and then opening the box and being like wait why did I do this again? So let's avoid that from happening.

First rule of Instant Pot Club: You never talk about Instant Pot Club. Sorry had to do it. Okay, first rule of Instant Pot Club is that you start small. That's a Lazy Genius principle in my book *The Lazy Genius Way*, and it works on Instant Pots too. If you look at the buttons and see all the potential, if you open an Instant Pot cookbook and see all the recipes, if you open the instruction manual that comes with the Instant Pot and see all of the settings and functions and rules, you will put the thing back in its box and hate me for telling you about this thing. But that's not because of me, as much as I'm happy taking the force of your displeasure. It's because you're assuming you have to figure it all out right away. That is not a thing. So before you even order the thing, decide once - see, another Lazy Genius principle! - what food you'll learn to cook first. Keep it simple. Something like hardboiled eggs or rice or oatmeal or one particular dump and

stir recipe that doesn't require anything but one function. Know where you'll start, and start small. That's rule number one.

Rule number two is: Understand the seal. The whole reason a pressure cooker works is because it forces the food to cook under high pressure, and there are two main things to know about that so that your food cooks the way it's supposed to and so you don't accidentally get hurt. Now, should you be concerned for your mortal life because of a small appliance that cost as much as two Hummer's full of gas? No. It's not scary. But a lot of the language around Instant Pots is kind of dramatic for valid reasons, but we think everyone is Chicken Little and don't pay attention to the stuff we actually should pay attention to. So here are the two things. First, the pressure seal and second the pressure valve. Okay, so there's a silicone sealing ring that's part of the Instant Pot lid. Its job is to keep the pressure in the pot. If that movable silicone ring is not correctly positioned around the immovable metal ring, the pressure won't stay trapped which means your food won't properly cook. Which is a massive bummer when you're trying to make food. So before you secure your lid, check to make sure that silicone ring isn't gapping anywhere.

The second part of understanding the seal is the pressure valve. In order for your food to cook the right way, the pressure can't escape the Instant Pot, right? Also in order for you to open your Instant Pot after it's done cooking your food, you have to release the pressure that's built up inside. It's actually built to not open under that intense pressure because you will get a face full of steam and quite a horrible injury. The Instant Pot won't physically open until the pressure or its steam is released. So there's a pressure valve that's set to either Sealing or Venting. Sealing means it's sealed and the pressure is trapped. Venting means the pressure is slowly being released or vented out. Now, I wish there was a switch or a button or something really concrete that you could flip from sealing to venting, but there's not. Instead there's a little black doohicky on the top of the lid that does this very important job but doesn't - to me - look as important as it should. You basically toggle the black plastic thing from sealing to venting. And it feels kind of flimsy. Just a warning. You're like, wait is this working? But it is as long as the black thing is pointing at the right word.

So before you put on your lid when it's time to cook something, make sure that silicone ring is secured around the wire ring. And next when you secure your lid, you want to make sure that black piece of plastic is toggled to sealing so that the pressure will actually stay inside the pot. When the recipe is over or when the timer beeps, you have a couple of options. You could immediately turn that toggle to venting, and steam would spew out at you like lava. Well, not at you. It goes straight up. But it's a little intense the first time. That's called quick release, when you quickly or almost immediately vent out the pressure once the timer has gone off. Remember that pressure cooking is precise and run by those buttons, so you'll always set a timer. That's how the Instant Pot works. But there's a second release option called manual release. Manual release is basically waiting a little bit to let the pressure settle on its own before you turn that toggle from sealing to venting. Some recipes call for a manual release of say ten minutes which means that after the timer beeps and the cooking is technically done, you still wait another ten

minutes before you vent out the steam. Some recipes benefit from that because there's still cooking happening even after the pressure stops.

So again, rule number two, understand the seal. Once you understand that basic idea, it's not scary at all.

And for me, those are really the only two rules you need to get started. Start small and understand the seal. Otherwise, find your own rhythm of using the Instant Pot in your own life.

Which leads us to my own rhythm. Oh wait I guess I did say I'd share favorite resources and tools didn't I? I'll do rhythm first and then share a few of those. Plus everything will be linked in the show notes. Okay, so once you get started, you'll find a bit of a rhythm. First, think again about where you'll store it. I beg of you to not say your counter. The counter is not the best place for anything in most situations, especially something that's not pretty. The Instant Pot is fine but she is not pretty. So please try and find a place. Now where you store it will have an impact on how often you use it. Mine is in my kitchen in a cabinet and easy to get to. That means when I decide to use it, I don't have to move a bunch of things or go to a garage or whatever to grab it. Think about that. Think about the things you own that you don't use very often because it's just annoying to get them out. If you want this appliance to serve you well, store it somewhere where it can find its own rhythm without the hindrance of annoyance.

Okay, so my rhythm. I don't usually use the Instant Pot for singular ingredients except for hard boiled eggs. My family doesn't like beans, we don't eat a lot of grains other than rice, we don't eat a lot of yogurt, so all of the individual ingredients that a lot of people use the Instant Pot for I do not. Which means my rhythm isn't regular. I'm just not in a season of life where I'm doing a ton of meal prep so that recipes are varied and lovely and done all in one chunk. I'm more in the season of "hey y'all let's eat the same twenty meals for the next three months from a limited ingredient list and be cool with it." And we are. Now will I use it for prep more in the future probably? You bet your buttons. But not now. And that's fine. So for me, I use it maybe once a week for a complete recipe. Also a lot of people use it to bake, but I don't.

So this is the perfect segue from a very short rhythm section to favorite tools and resources section. There are tons of accessories and tools that a lot of people recommend for the Instant Pot. So far I really have enjoyed two books from Coco Morante that are all Instant Pot recipes - The Essential Instant Pot Cookbook and The Ultimate Instant Pot Cookbook. She does a great job at giving you a kind crash course in pretty much everything you need to know. However, she has a list of recommended tools like most cookbooks do, and if I've said it once I've said more than once. A tool for your kitchen is only essential if you use it. It doesn't matter what experts say. It doesn't matter what I say. It doesn't matter what your mother-in-law or your best friend says. If somebody swears by something but you do not use it, it is not essential to you. Not everyone has the same list of essential tools, okay? So when it comes to the Instant Pot, because of how I use it to cook which is pretty simply, I don't have most of what Coco Morante says are must-have tools. She recommends silicone mitts. I don't use those because we serve straight from the pot. She recommends an extra inner metal pot, the actual thing the food is

cooked in, but we don't cook with the Instant Pot often enough to use two, let alone store two. She recommends a tempered glass lid so you can see inside when you're using the slow cook setting. I don't. She says to have jar lifters and jam funnels and seven-inch cake pans so you can fit your cake into the pot and a fat separator and silicone muffins tins. Honestly of the dozen things she says are must-haves, I have four. One of them comes with your pot, it's the stainless steel trivet. And the other three I already have: tongs, a kitchen thermometer, and a metal collapsible steamer basket. So here is your permission to not get what everybody else says you should until you actually need it. This is the problem with new gadgets and hobbies and systems we build; we have to support them with all this extra stuff everybody else says is essential, but if you don't use something, it is not essential. It is just noise. That's an entire principle slash chapter in *The Lazy Genius Way*, too, about how to essentialize things.

Also, can y'all believe we've already pulled four Lazy Genius principles into an Instant Pot episode? And they're not even cooking ones like batching or the Magic Question! This is why I love being a Lazy Genius. We learn how to think about our lives in ways that make sense for us, even with a topic like the Instant Pot.

So my essential tools are just tongs to easily move stuff around but that's true for so much cooking, the metal trivet that comes with the pot, a wooden spoon so you don't scratch the bottom of your pot, and I also sometimes use a plastic scraper or bench knife to get into the edges of the pot if something got a stubborn burn to it and I need to scrape it clean. But again I use that anyway for all kinds of things. So for me, I don't use or need anything extra or special that doesn't come with the Instant Pot itself. That might not be true of you, and that's okay. Just start small with how you learn it and use it and only buy supplies if you know you'll use them *and* remember our principle of putting everything in its place? Know where you'll put that extra stuff. Otherwise, it'll just clutter your kitchen, and that's our least favorite thing.

And that is the Instant Pot episode! I'll put links to all the things in the show notes, or you can go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/lazy/instantpot.

Thanks so much for listening! Don't forget to check out the limited release earrings from Wind Blown! They're so beautiful and will make such great gifts. As I say that, you could give a pair of those earrings along with a copy of *The Lazy Genius Way* to about any woman in your life and have a stellar holiday gift. For real. Wrap it up in a pretty tea towel for an extra touch. Okay, that's it for today! Thanks for being here, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!