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**“You were
loved all along”**
A mother finds her
jewelry...

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT FOOD

Gail Simmons

The *Top Chef* judge tells you her key ingredient, her secret snack, and her hands-down favorite dessert now.



Gail also hosts *Top Chef: Just Desserts* on Bravo.



"My guilty pleasure? Dive-bar chicken wings—the spicier the better."

"I love having carbonated water in my fridge. The Sodastream soda maker lets you control the fizz, and I add natural fruit juice so it has a nice flavor."



Adventurous eating starts at home. My mother was a cooking teacher and a food writer, so I grew up eating tandoori chicken while other kids had peanut butter and jelly. At the time, I yearned for peanut butter, but my exposure to great, diverse foods molded who I am. My mom made putting exciting things on the dinner table look effortless.

Being organized is your greatest asset in the kitchen. We talk a lot on *Top Chef* about having your *mise en place*, which is the best way to ensure a successful recipe. The point is to have everything ready before you start cooking. Read the recipe, measure the oil, and chop everything so you have the exact amount you'll need. Cooking happens quickly, and this just makes it easier.

People always ask how I deal with eating for a living. Let me tell you, Tom [Colicchio] never gets that question. He's on the "Sexiest Man Alive" list; no one asks how *he* does it. But when you Google me, it says I'm pregnant. I've never been pregnant!

I have a picky sweet tooth. I don't like desserts too sweet, and I like them to have lots of textures. Recently I had ricotta and thinly sliced peaches with honey, basil, and pistachios—it was delicious. I'm also into really caramel-y fig tarts (see Gail's recipe at redbookmag.com/gailsrecipe). But that doesn't mean I don't enjoy a giant piece of chocolate cake once in a while! —AS TOLD TO BRITTANY BURKE



"A soft-poached or fried egg makes everything taste better. A BLT with avocado and a fried egg is my absolute favorite."



"I eat so much rich food at work that at home I tend to cook vegetarian dishes, like couscous with marinated eggplant and peppers."

4 THINGS YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND IN MY KITCHEN

PARMESAN CHEESE



"I like to sprinkle it on vegetables for the last two minutes I'm roasting them."

RED BOAT FISH SAUCE



"I honeymooned in Vietnam, where fish sauce is an integral ingredient—it enhances any dish."

LEMON JUICER



"I'm obsessed with getting every single drop of juice out of a lemon!"

KUHN RIKON KNIVES



"These Swiss knives come in really great colors. They're super-sharp and not expensive!"