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## Cooking \_\_\_\_\_ quick & lite

### Why Cook?

Some people love to cook—they may find it relaxing or an outlet for their creative talents. On the other hand, many people who love to eat, hate to cook. These people may lack the skills for—or the interest in—preparing meals. Others simply find cooking, and the subsequent cleanup process, too time consuming for their busy schedules.

Cooking and preparing meals for yourself and your family is an important skill for improving your health, and successfully managing your weight. According to researchers analyzing National Weight Control Registry data, the majority of people who have lost weight and kept it off prepare nearly 90% of their own meals. When you are the cook, you choose the recipes and have control of the ingredients that go into your food.

If you like to cook, this module will familiarize you with low-fat cooking techniques you can add to your culinary repertoire. If the kitchen is like a foreign country to you, this module provides tips that can help you explore, and maybe even enjoy, preparing your own healthy meals.

### Set Yourself Up for Success

During the transition back to self-prepared meals and during the early stages of long term management it

## tools for success

- Understand the concept of “low-fat” as it relates to different cooking methods.
- Modify favorite recipes to reduce fat and calories.
- Use quick alternatives to fast food meals.
- Prepare healthy snacks.
- Find healthy alternatives to favorite foods.

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is especially important to minimize your exposure to food. Spending too much time in the kitchen preparing meals and sampling results is a recipe for weight gain. Aim for 30-minute meals. If cooking has been a favorite pastime for you, concentrate on the enjoyment of trying new recipes and find other ways to fill your free time.

### Tips To Avoid Mindless Nibbling

- Have a small snack when you are cooking to take the edge off of your appetite. Cooking while you are hungry can lead to sampling.
- Chew gum while cooking and/or while cleaning up after a meal.

## Supplies For Success

Following are lists of kitchen tools and ingredients you can use to prepare tasty, low-fat meals. The lists are not inclusive, and you don't need every tool or ingredient suggested before you can begin to use low-fat cooking techniques. Gradually add items you need (drop subtle hints to friends or family members about possible holiday or birthday gift ideas).

### Tools of the Trade

- Nonstick baking sheets, loaf pans, muffin cups, skillets, and pots (varying sizes) with lids. Make sure one pot is big enough to make large batches of low-fat soup, stew, and chili that can be frozen in pre-portioned amounts.
- Fat-separating measuring cup. Since the spout is at the bottom of the cup, it is easy to pour off the broth and leave behind the fat that floats on top.
- Steamer rack. A useful, inexpensive metal version looks like a flower with petals and opens up to hold your vegetables for steaming in any pot. Steamer pots are also available.
- Food processor or blender. Can be used for chopping vegetables; essential for pureeing soups, fruits, vegetables, and cottage cheese.
- Storage containers. Plastic tubs or oven-safe glass dishes with lids are handy for storing foods in the refrigerator and freezer. Some containers can go right from the freezer to the microwave. These are good for cooking a pre-made entrees.
- Large skillet or wok with nonstick surface for stir-frying.
- Table top grill (such as a George Foreman grill). These are easy to use and especially convenient for preparing meats without heating up your kitchen. No added fat is needed and clean-up is simple with the non-stick grilling plates.
- Garlic press. One of the most useful herbs is garlic, especially when cooking meats, poultry, and fish. An easy-to-clean garlic press will save you time and effort.
- Good knives. Carbon-steel knives keep a better edge than stainless steel ones, but they do rust and require a little extra care. You should have a variety of types: paring, bread, chef's, and a small serrated knife for tender foods that require a sawing action instead of a slicing action (e.g., angel food cake).
- Large-capacity freezer, either a stand-alone unit or one that is part of your refrigerator. Make sure you have a lot of room to freeze batches of pre-made meals and low-fat ingredients.

## Staple Ingredients

The foundation of a healthy diet is low-fat ingredients, including foods rich in carbohydrates and fiber. Whole-grain cereals and breads, grains, pastas, rice, and fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables supply this foundation and should be readily available in your house.

### Grains and Starches

- Whole-wheat flour, regular and pastry (good for baking)
- Whole cornmeal (look for this in the health food section)
- Oatmeal, steel cut, regular, or quick-cooking
- Rice, brown and wild
- Whole wheat pasta, different sizes and shapes
- Grains (bulgur, kasha, quinoa, whole wheat couscous, etc.)
- Potatoes, russet, red, Yukon gold, sweet potatoes and yams
- Popcorn
- Ready-to-eat shredded bran and flake cereals (at least 5 grams fiber/serving)
- Cornstarch to thicken sauces and gravies
- Whole-wheat bread
- Tortillas, whole wheat and corn

### Fruits and Vegetables

- A variety of frozen (without sauces) and fresh (capitalize on what is in season) produce
- Unsweetened 100 % fruit juices and low sodium vegetable juices
- Lemons and/or fresh lemon juice
- Low sodium or no-salt added canned tomatoes/sauces

## Dairy Products

- Non-fat dry milk powder
- Skim or 1% milk
- Evaporated skim milk
- Plain, non-fat or low-fat yogurt
- Light sour cream
- Low-fat hard cheese (grated, shredded, or sliced)
- Low-fat cottage cheese

## Meat and Meat Equivalents

Note: Most lean meats, poultry, or fish must be purchased as needed or frozen, but you can keep the following items on hand:

- Canned legumes (e.g., chickpeas, navy, black, pinto, and kidney beans)
- Dried beans and peas (lentils, split peas, navy, pinto, kidney, etc.)
- Shelf-stable tofu
- Frozen extra lean (4% fat) ground turkey, chicken, or beef
- Frozen, pre-sliced, and cooked turkey or chicken
- Frozen, cleaned and/or cooked shrimp (look for 30/pound or more)

## Oils and Fats

Low-fat cooking doesn't mean no-fat cooking. Some fat is needed for good health and, used sparingly, can be part of a healthful diet. Have on hand:

- Canola, olive, or peanut oil
- Nut oils (walnut, hazelwood) and avocado oil for salad dressings
- Soft-spread margarine (look for those with no trans fats)
- Vegetable oil cooking spray

## 4 Cooking Quick & Lite

### Condiments and Seasonings

- Mustard (use different varieties, such as Dijon or spicy brown)
- Reduced-fat mayonnaise and salad dressings
- Stocks or broths (e.g., chicken, beef, vegetable)
- Butter-flavored granules
- Salt-free seasoning mixes
- Wine
- Vinegars (try different varieties like balsamic or herb-flavored)
- Sauces
  - Low-fat tomato sauce
  - Low-sodium soy sauce
  - Teriyaki sauce
  - Barbecue sauce

### Spices and Herbs

The use of seasonings and herbs enhances the natural flavors of foods, allowing you to use less fat and sodium. Try new ones to learn how they can add to your enjoyment while lowering the calories added to foods. Growing fresh herbs in pots is easy and a wonderful way to add variety to your cooking repertoire.

- Garlic and onion powders
- Fresh garlic
- Dried or fresh herbs (basil, chives, dill, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, thyme)
- Spices (cayenne pepper, chili powder, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, ginger, nutmeg, pepper)
- Refrigerator stable tubes of fresh herb and seasoning blends (like ground garlic, ginger, pesto, lemongrass, and tomato paste)

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## Low-fat Cooking Skills

### Tenderization

Because there is less fat between the muscle fibers, low-fat cuts of meat and poultry tend to be less tender and drier than fatty cuts. Substitute fish, which is naturally tender, or use one of the following methods to tenderize meat and poultry.

**Mechanical Tenderizing** – Meats and poultry can be pounded thin with a special mallet or pierced repeatedly before cooking. Another way of tenderizing meat mechanically is to cut it in small strips against the grain of the muscle fibers. This is especially effective when using meat in a stir-fry.

**Chemical Tenderizing** – Marinades made with citrus juices, vinegar, low-fat salad dressings, or pineapple juice are excellent for tenderizing meat. The longer you marinate, the more tender the meat becomes. Another advantage of marinating is the flavor boost that the marinade ingredients give to meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables. (Note: It is important when marinating fish in an acidic marinade, not to do so for more than a few hours. The acid can cause unpleasant changes in the texture of the fish.)

### Traditional Low- or No-Fat Cooking

Many traditional cooking methods require little or no fat.

**Baking** – Uses dry heat in the moderate temperature range (250°F – 500°F). Appropriate for baking muffins, cakes, and cookies, and for cooking meats, fish, and poultry (cover with lid or foil to retain moisture).

## Quick, Light, and Easy Cooking Ideas

### 5 Fresh & Fast Ways to Serve Rotisserie Chicken

Tip: Begin each recipe by skinning the chicken.

**Chicken Caesar** – Remove the breast, slice into strips, and place atop 2 cups torn Romaine lettuce leaves. Sprinkle with 1/3 cup fat-free herbed croutons, 2 teaspoons of grated Parmesan cheese, and 2 tablespoons of low-fat Caesar dressing.

**Lite Chicken Quesadilla** – Lightly spray a nonstick pan with vegetable spray, place over medium heat. Add a whole grain tortilla and top with 1/2 cup shredded low-fat cheese (Monterey jack or taco blend work well). Add 1/2 cup diced chicken. Put foil over tortilla and heat until cheese melts. Serve with your favorite salsa and salad.

**Stir-fry Jump Start** – Cut chicken into bite size pieces and use it in your favorite stir-fry recipe. Using cooked shrimp or poultry is a great way to jump-start your meal preparations. Just be sure to reduce cooking time accordingly.

**Chicken Fajita** – Thinly slice 1 large red and 1 large green bell pepper, and 1 medium red onion. Heat 2 tsp. olive oil in a nonstick pan. Add vegetables, sprinkle liberally with fajita seasoning. Sauté until vegetables soften. Add thinly sliced cooked chicken and more seasoning (to taste). Sauté until chicken is heated through. Spoon chicken mixture into four warm corn tortillas. Garnish with low-fat sour cream, salsa, and low-fat refried beans or black bean dip.

**Rotisserie As Is** – Pair it with different side dishes to give the meal a unique feel. Some delis offer rotisserie chicken with various seasonings and marinades, for example, lemon herb, Mediterranean, barbecue, and Jamacian jerk.

- Serve a basic chicken with barbecue sauce, 1/2 cup of baked beans, corn on the cob, and fruit salad.
- Give it an Asian flair by drizzling teriyaki sauce over the chicken. Serve with snow peas and 1/2 cup pre-cooked brown rice.
- Pair a Mediterranean herb chicken with one cup of tube shaped pasta topped with low-calorie pasta sauce, and Italian vegetable blend or green beans. Use your imagination.

### 5 Fast Fixes for Ground Meat

Tip: Look for extra lean (4% fat) ground beef, ground turkey or chicken breast, or ground bison.

Tip: For each recipe, begin by browning meat in a nonstick skillet and discard the drippings.

**Soft Tacos** – Add your favorite packaged taco seasoning. Spoon into corn tortillas heated on a nonstick cookie sheet. Fill tacos with meat mixture, top with shredded lettuce, tomatoes, salsa, and low-fat shredded Mexican cheese blend.

**Slender Spaghetti with Meat Sauce** – Add your favorite tomato sauce and vegetables to cooked meat. In the meantime, cook spaghetti according to package directions. Serve with tossed salad or Italian vegetable blend.

**Sloppy Josephines** – Add your favorite Sloppy Jo mix, cook as directed on flavoring package. Serve on half of a whole wheat hamburger bun.

**Oriental Express Lettuce Wraps** – Add 1/2 cup each of Hoisin and Asian peanut sauces to 1-1/2 pounds browned ground meat (as described above). Heat through. Just before serving, add 1 medium cucumber seeded and diced, 1/2 cup shredded carrots, 1/4 cup torn fresh mint leaves or cilantro, salt and pepper to taste. Divide between 12 large lettuce leaves. Serves 4.

### A Dash of Dessert

Tip: Fat-free non-dairy whipped topping or fat free yogurt can make even low-calorie desserts special.

Parfait – Top sugar-free Jell-O® or fat-free, sugar-free Jell-O® pudding with 2 tablespoons of thinly sliced bananas, strawberries, or whole small berries like blueberries. Add 2 tbsp. fat free vanilla yogurt .

Fruit and Cream – Mix 1/2 cup of seasonal fruit with 1/2 cup yogurt.

Berries in a Cloud – Form 1/2 cup of yogurt into nest-like shape. Fill with 1/4 cup of berries.

Festive Fruit – A bit of brown sugar can make fruit more festive. Top 1 cup of berries or sliced fruit with 1 tablespoon of brown sugar or brown sugar substitute, stir and eat. Spread sugar evenly over 1/2 grapefruit and broil for 3-5 minutes.

### Nutrition Snacking

Snacking is often viewed negatively, probably because people tend to snack on foods with low nutrient density (chips, cakes, pies, candy). Properly planned, snacks can be a part of a successful weight management program. Healthy snacks should:

- Contain whole grain starches, protein, vegetables or fruits, and/or a little healthy fat (especially if there is a long interval between a snack and the next meal).
- Be a part of your meal plan to meet your daily nutrient needs within your daily caloric requirements.
- Be eaten at a planned time and place (to prevent snack time from becoming a series of haphazard eating events or all-day grazing).
- Allow enough time between a snack and a meal so you will still have an appetite for the meal.

### Nutrition Snacks with Little or No Prep

#### Protein Foods

- Low-fat string cheese
- Lean sandwich meats (ham, turkey, and roast beef)
- Low-fat or non-fat cottage cheese
- Low-fat or non-fat yogurt or kefir
- Hummus
- Low-fat bean dip
- Hard boiled egg

#### Grain Products

- Whole-grain breads
- Low-sugar whole grain cereals
- Whole wheat mini-bagels
- "Lite" or air-popped popcorn
- Baked corn tortillas
- Wasa crackers

#### Fruits/Vegetables

- Cut-up fresh, raw vegetables
- Fresh or frozen fruit
- Dried fruits
- Vegetable soup- broth based

#### Healthy Fats

- Small handful of nuts or seeds
- Nut butters (peanut butter, almond butter, cashew butter, etc)
- Avocado

#### Beverages

- 100% Fruit juices, ½ cup
- Low-sodium vegetable juices
- Skim or 1% milk
- Iced tea

## Spilling the Beans

Dry beans, low in cost and high in nutrition, provide an endless variety of low-fat, protein-rich meals. A great virtue of dry beans is their ability to combine with or accompany other foods. Canned or soaked beans can provide a main dish in a short amount of time. Following are hints for using beans successfully:

**Quick soak method** – Overnight soaking of dried beans is not necessary with this easy quick-soak method. It also helps remove most of the gas-producing carbohydrates which prevent people from eating beans as often as they might like. Inspect and remove any broken, shriveled, or discolored beans and foreign material, then rinse them thoroughly in cold water. Don't rinse beans until they are ready to be soaked as damp beans may sour. In a large pot, add 10 cups of water for each pound of dry beans. Bring to a boil. Boil for 2 or 3 minutes, remove from heat, cover, and let stand for 1 hour. Discard water, rinse beans, and cook thoroughly in fresh water or stock.

**Cooking** – Simmer beans gently with the lid tilted until they are tender, to avoid breaking the skins. Acidic ingredients—such as tomatoes, vinegar, and lemon juice—stop the rehydration process and should not be added until the beans are fully cooked. Pressure-cooking is an alternate method of cooking beans. Follow cooker instructions.

**Storage** – Store dry beans in a moisture-proof container in a cool, dry place. It pays to cook enough beans for more than one meal at a time. Extra cooked beans and bean dishes can be kept in the refrigerator up to five days or frozen for up to six months. Freeze beans in 1- or 2-cup portions for thawing ease, using an airtight, moisture-proof container. Thaw beans slowly using the microwave

defrost cycle, overnight in the refrigerator, or about an hour in a pan of warm water.

**Preventing digestive problems with beans** – A common concern about dry beans is the intestinal gas and bloating they may cause. The problem is more common for those who eat beans infrequently. The more often a food appears in the system, the better the chances of developing the appropriate digestive enzymes needed to handle it. The following suggestions can help:

- Gradually build up your body's tolerance. Eat small servings initially, then slowly increase your intake.
- Pouring off the soaking liquid and thorough cooking help alleviate much of the gas-producing carbohydrates.
- Be sure to drink adequate fluids. The high fiber content of beans requires that you consume more water to aid in digestion.
- If you still experience gas or bloating, you may wish to try Beano<sup>®\*</sup>, a food enzyme that breaks down the complex sugars so they are more digestible. Beano is available in liquid or tablet form at most drugstores and health food stores.

**Canned pre-cooked beans** – Many beans are available fully cooked. Look for cans of kidney beans, garbanzo beans, white beans, black beans, pinto beans, and red beans. These can be added to soups, stews, fillings for tortillas, salads, mashed for bean dips, etc. To use, discard liquid, place beans in a strainer, and rinse well.

\* Beano<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of GlaxoSmithKlein.

### Middle Eastern Bean Salad

3-1/2 cups Cooked, drained kidney beans or 2 cans (about 16 oz. each) kidney beans, rinsed and drained  
 1/2 cup Diced red onion  
 1 large Tomato, seeded and rinsed  
 1 medium Cucumber, seeded and rinsed  
 1/2 cup Chopped parsley

1 Tablespoon Chopped, fresh mint or 1 teaspoon dried mint  
 1/4 cup Lemon juice  
 1 teaspoon Cumin (optional)  
 1/4 teaspoon Salt (optional)  
 1/4 teaspoon Pepper  
 2 Tablespoons Olive oil

Combine beans and the next five ingredients; set aside. Mix lemon juice with cumin, salt, and pepper; beat in olive oil. Fold into salad. Chill several hours to blend flavors. Six servings. One serving equals 1 bread, 2 vegetables, and 1 fat exchange. Adapted with permission from consumer education material provided by NorthHarvest Bean Growers Association.