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HEALTH-WISE COOKING TIPS

TOP 10 WAYS TO DITCH THE FAT AND KEEP THE TASTE

By Susan Burke March, MS, RD, LD/N, CDE

Dietary fat is a nutritional paradox – all fats are equal in terms of calories per gram (nine, compared to protein and carbohydrate's four); but it's useful to remember that some fats are healthful, and some are harmful (think trans fat in shortening and hydrogenated oils including stick margarine). We are faced with a physiological and sometimes psychological dilemma: fat tastes very good. Fat brings flavor to foods, and many fat-free products aren't worth the plastic they're packaged in.

Diets devoid of fat are dismal, not necessary and even ill advised, since we all need a certain amount of healthy fat daily for absorption of essential vitamins and minerals. Instead of eating packaged, processed and additive-laden "diet foods," use smart strategies to modify your usual recipes and when dining out, too. Reduce fat without sacrificing flavor – this strategy will help you enjoy your food without feeling deprived.

1. HARDWARE: The right pots and pans make lower fat cooking a breeze. I especially enjoy my fairly priced Calphalon large nonstick skillet: it conducts heat evenly and allows me to cook healthfully, almost fat-free, and with excellent results. Last night I sautéed onion, garlic, red peppers, zucchini and some seasonings in just a teaspoon of olive oil, then added two pounds of peeled large shrimp (you can also use chicken breast, tofu or loin cuts of beef or pork). The moisture released from the vegetables was just enough to sear the shrimp and cook them quickly – delicious! Nonstick pans are a must for baking, grilling, sautéing – even for soup. Use a little cooking spray, or sauté in wine, water or 100% juice.

2. METHODS & TECHNIQUES: I have a slogan when it comes to cooking and eating – bake, broil, grill, poach or sauté foods instead of deep-frying or cooking in fat – stick to this philosophy and stay thin, naturally. For example, a skinless chicken breast that's been dipped in low-fat buttermilk, rolled in whole-grain crushed cereal (such as Grape Nuts) and baked in the oven is crispy and crunchy, and compared to a deep-fried one saves more than 155 calories per serving (which can add up to 12 pounds of calories reduced per year).

3. REDUCE & INCREASE: Another good strategy is to think "substitute," not "eliminate." For example, replace half the oil with applesauce or fruit puree for an equally moist muffin or cake; grate some naturally sweet carrots and add to quick breads and casseroles.

4. LEAN INGREDIENTS: Shop for the leanest cuts of meat and trim all visible fat before cooking. Ground meat should be at least 95% lean and turkey breast burgers are great – or replace a third of your ground beef with ground turkey breast. Buy turkey breast – "ground turkey" often contains turkey skin and dark meat, making it higher in fat, more like ground beef.

5. LOWER DAIRY: Whole milk contains a gram of saturated fat per ounce, so choosing "non" or "low" fat means lower calories, naturally. "Low fat" means three grams of fat per serving, or less. "Reduced fat" means 25% less than the usual calories per serving – and doesn't necessarily indicate a low calorie food or drink. Low and nonfat dairy products have equal or more protein and essential vitamins and minerals, and pediatricians recommend nonfat or 1% fat dairy beginning at the latest two years old.

a. Choose low and nonfat varieties of milk, sour cream, yogurt and cheese.



b. Low fat buttermilk makes a good substitute for whole milk in many of your favorite recipes.

c. Nonfat evaporated milk has a creamy consistency and works well as a cream substitute in sauces, pies, ice cream and, of course, in tea and coffee.

d. Choose evaporated milk instead of condensed milk, which is heavily sweetened with sugar.

6. EGGS: Most of the fat and all of the cholesterol is in egg yolks, so when dining out, order an egg white omelet. When cooking, substitute two egg whites for one whole egg and cut the fat, cholesterol and calories.

7. CRUMBS & CRACKERS: Instead of commercial bread crumbs – usually full of oil and trans fat – use crunchy breakfast cereal such as Grape Nuts or organic flakes (no high fructose corn syrup). Avoid "hydrogenated" fats (trans fat); choose crackers with "whole grain" or "whole wheat" as the first ingredient.

8. CONTROL THE CHEESE: Review your recipes and what you select when dining out – are you going for cheesy favorites? Cheese is one of those foods that just don't fit into a daily weight maintenance diet – so make it occasional, and in small proportions. Make a wonderfully tasty pizza with lots of grilled vegetables, and instead of topping with an inch-thick layer of full-fat mozzarella cheese use low-fat ricotta and ½ cup of part skim mozzarella, grated.

9. DRESS LIGHTLY: Dismiss hundreds of calories from oil-drenched salads, topped with grated cheese and croutons. Instead, mix up a delicious dressing of balsamic vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, a little fresh lemon juice and some dried herbs.

10. BEEF IT UP: With vegetables, that is. Serve larger portions of vegetables and cut back on meat. Most Americans eat double the required protein, but only a fraction of the recommended servings of vegetables and fruit daily. Instead of a big steak and small salad, have a big salad, a small steak plus a baked potato with salsa.

Thinking about doing something different is the first step toward change, but doing something different...well, that's where many people get stuck, especially when it comes to modifying what they eat. Instead of thinking of diet as a verb, as in "going on a weight loss diet" and anticipating hunger, deprivation, boredom and failure, consider that the primary definition of "diet" is "the kind(s) of foods a person usually eats." So make your usual diet healthy and calorie-appropriate for your unique needs, and you'll never have to "go on a diet" again!

Registered and Licensed Dietitian Susan Burke March, MS, CDE, is a dynamic speaker, accomplished author, enthusiastic media representative and committed professional counselor dedicated to helping people learn strategies to improve their health and accomplish their weight goals. She is the author of *Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally*, which offers a wealth of practical information, tips and strategies for people who are serious about taking control of their health, fat-free, for life. She may be reached online at www.SusanBurkeMarch.com.