

Healthier Eating

Taking care preparing and cooking food is the best way to go

I recall when I was younger I ate what I enjoyed with no thought for how it might affect my health in later life. I'm regretting that now. One of my problems is cholesterol which is clogging the arteries. The build up, I am told, was caused by too much saturated fat.

It's easy enough to check what you are eating of this particular fat and others by looking at the labels. You'll find most foods contain them, especially high-fat dairy foods and processed meat such as bacon and pressed meats like Spam; and most of the smoked sausages including pepperoni and salami are loaded with it. There's also quite a lot of saturated fat in uncooked barbecue and breakfast sausages. Certain uncooked meat has a fair amount, but provided the bulk of fat is removed prior to cooking, I have found I can still enjoy it without increasing my cholesterol level – at least, so the blood tests tell me. And when frying, we were told to use extra virgin olive oil.

Dairy products are supposedly good for you, but in moderation. I always used to have a good supply of cheddar cheese; and if you have a look at some of my early recipes you'll see it was a regular. As well as this in the meals, we often snacked on cheese and crackers – brie, camembert, Philly and blue soft cheese. For me, all of these are out and the only two I am allowed are ricotta and cottage cheese. I don't like ricotta, so I've adapted some of my recipes to use cottage instead of the high-fat varieties. Another delight was cream. That went into some of my favourite dishes. Not anymore. These days I make up a cream using a mixture of cottage cheese and skim milk (see Handy Hints - low cholesterol cream). A cottage-cheese cream is also a good substitute in sauces such a white roux.

Preparing meat for cooking, I take off most of the fat with the exception of the marbling in beef. Apart from being too difficult to cut out, it usually breaks down during the cooking process and helps to tenderise the meat. I like roast pork, and I know many adore the crackle. That's a definite no-no for me; but then, I'm not keen on it anyway. As for pork steaks and diced pork, same again – I cut off most of the fat. Some people can't afford the better cuts of meat, and as far as roasting-beef and ordinary steaks are concerned, they can be tough. That can be avoided by braising before adding to the other ingredients (see Recipe R02 – tender beef stroganoff). And instead of roasting joints in the oven, try a pot roast on the stove top (R156). Then there's Braised Pork (R139). Both of these we found were really tender to the point of pull-apart. Minced meat is very adaptable; but cheaper grades have quite a lot of fat. This can be reduced by cooking lightly in a pan, then pouring off any fat before adding to the other ingredients.

As a white meat, chicken is claimed to be healthy; except for some parts of it. The skin may taste yummy when it's roasted or fried; but it isn't good for you. So, chicken breast fillets are the way to go; or if cheaper cuts are all that can be afforded, the Budget

Recipe BSR01 details how to cook them and reduce the fat content. Even eye bacon is healthier after boiling for a minute or two in water. Then, once drained, most of the fat and salt are gone.

When it comes to vegetables, five serves a meal, particularly those high in fibre, is supposed to be ideal; and it is as long as they are prepared properly. Some advocate leaving the skins on because, they claim, that's the most nutritious part. Often, though, skins are usually exposed to fertilisers and chemicals during the growing period; then who would want to eat the skin? Wash any fruit or vegetables first; and peel them before cooking. We've also found that they taste better if microwaved; whereas when boiled on the stove top they lose not only some of the flavour, but also much of the goodness contained ends up in the water. Chemical contamination also can apply to fruit. Washing is always best; but even after that, I personally wouldn't fancy biting into the skin of apples or pears that have been sprayed for codling moth.

Asian dishes are popular, and the accompaniment is often rice. If steamed it retains all of the starch. That's fine if you don't mind the carbohydrates, or need them to put on a bit of weight. We don't, so we generally cook our rice in the microwave; then flush it with cold water prior to re-heating once the main meal is ready to serve. Potatoes contain starch as well, and there's not a lot that can be done about that. If creamy mashed potato is required, however, we simply add a little skim milk, stir it in; then re-heat same as the rice.

Healthy eating isn't easy during these days of rush and tear; and home-cooked meals aren't always convenient. So, it's on the phone to order up pizza, or burgers, or chicken and chips, or pies... Oh, dear. Fat, fat, fat by the bucket load! Take-outs cause the same health problems as cakes and snacks; plus sweet biscuits and suchlike have added sugar as a bonus. Reserve them as occasional treats rather than a daily necessity. And cut back on those high-sugar sodas; especially energy drinks that contain huge amounts of stuff that might help keep athletes and manual workers going; whereas most ordinary people living sedentary lives don't need them. And certainly not kids!

All of this does sound rather dismal, I know; and changing eating habits can be hard; but poor health isn't a condition anyone with sense wants to live with for the rest of their life, surely? Well, I don't, so I'm sticking to the plan. Why don't you give it a try it?

A Season of Happiness - helping you and yours towards a better lifestyle

For a look at some more informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the web page



Where every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for us may not work for you. Please bear this in mind.