

HEALTHY AND DELICIOUS - YES, WE MEAN YOUR COOKING!

Healthy and delicious? Would you say that describes your cooking?

If you're right now rolling your eyes or shaking your head - or both! - that's okay. Today many people don't really know how to cook at all much less do they know how to cook dishes that actually taste good. And when they do cook something that tastes good it's usually because they've added all sorts of very unhealthy ingredients such as sugar, butter, oil, salt, and so on.

Today obesity has become a problem that is more widespread than many people would like to admit even if they themselves have put on some additional pounds over the years. The problem with excessive body weight is not just a matter of looks, however. According to most studies, excessive body fat and obesity is connected with:

- Asthma
- Arthritis
- Birth Defects
- Cancers
- Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)
- Chronic Venous Insufficiency (CVI)

- Daytime Sleepiness
- Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)
- Diabetes (Type 2)
- End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD)
- Gallbladder Disease
- Gout
- Heat Disorders
- Hypertension
- Impaired Immune Response
- Impaired Respiratory Function
- Infections Following Wounds
- Infertility
- Liver Disease
- Obstetric and Gynecologic Complications
- Orthopedic Complications
- Pain
- Pancreatitis
- Psychosocial Effects & Stigma
- Sleep Apnea
- Stroke
- Surgical Complications
- Urinary Stress Incontinence

Really, is there any part of your body that is not affected by excessive body weight? Fat cells are carried from the blood to every part of the body where they often clog and choke blood circulation and rest on the vital organs. Excessive

body fat also puts undue pressure on the circulatory and respiratory system, and in extreme cases can even cause death.

So learning to cook in a way that is healthy is very important, but of course no one wants to eat food that is bland and tasteless. Very often it's just the taste of fattening foods that cause people to eat the way they do - those added ingredients of salt, sugar, butter, oil, and other fattening substances typically taste very good!

How can you then prepare dishes that are tasty but healthy at the same time? If you can't just deep fry everything in oil and can't load your dishes up with sugar and oil, what to do?

Fortunately there are ways of cooking that are healthy and nutritious but that are very tasty as well; it's simply a matter of knowing those methods and tricks that will bring out the flavor of food or that will enhance it while at the same time won't add excessive calories. And if you're ready to find out those methods and tricks, let's get started!

USING THE RIGHT TOOLS

Have you ever been in the kitchen of a real restaurant - not a cheap family style restaurant but one where they serve a wide variety of dishes? If you ever went back behind those doors you would find a wide variety of pots, pans, and small appliances. Blenders, mixers, rotisseries, grills, and skillets abound. But what about your own kitchen? Many people have a few pots and pans and perhaps a food processor and blender, but that's usually about it.

The right tools for cooking in a healthy way may be a bit expensive but they can be worth the investment especially when you consider the lifetime of use you will probably get out of them. Consider at least a few:

A tabletop grill.

You might laugh at the idea of using a George Foreman grill but a tool like this, whether that particular brand or not, can really do exactly what it advertises - allow the fat to drain away as the meat cooks.

How often do you cook meat in oil or its own fat? Are you in the habit of pan frying just about everything with a big dollop of oil or butter? Using a tabletop grill with some nonstick cooking spray can save you literally hundreds of calories every single meal.

A grill can also enable you to cook leaner cuts of meat such as boneless, skinless chicken breasts and fish fillets. You may have shied away from trying these types of meats simply because you only knew to fry them in a pan but a grill can create tasty dishes for these meats that have fewer calories.

A rotisserie.

Again, you may dismiss a rotisserie as just being another "As Seen on TV" product but really many restaurants use these for a variety of meat dishes. They too allow the fat from meats to drip away rather than to be soaked up by the meat as it cooks. You will save hundreds of calories with every meal if you use a rotisserie for chicken or roasts.

You don't need to pay so much for a rotisserie; many are available in smaller sizes that are very affordable. They may take up a bit of size on your counter but if you can clear out a space in your cupboard or pantry it can be well worth it. Not only do they cook healthier dishes but usually meats cooked on rotisseries are much tastier as well!

Give a rotisserie and try and see if you don't agree that the meat dishes you get with these are tastier and leaner than anything else you've ever had.

A crock pot or slow cooker.

Foods that you buy off the grocery store shelves also typically contain an inordinate amount of sugar and added fat. These things are used as preservatives and to add taste and flavor as well. If you purchase a particular brand of soup or stew and enjoy its flavor you're more likely to buy it again, regardless of the ingredients.

When you get a crock pot or slow cooker you can make your own soup, stew, chili, and meat dishes without all those additives. You can control what goes into these dishes and can omit the added sugar and fat. Many find that making vegetarian dishes or at least reducing the amount of meat they use in these types of dishes, or choosing leaner cuts of meat such as chicken or pork, also cuts down on fat and calories.

Using a crock pot or slower cooker in this way is also helpful for busy families as you can make a large pot of one particular dish and then freeze it in individual portions or servings for use throughout the week. After a long day at work you can just put some chili in the microwave and a few minutes later you have dinner.

A blender.

Fruit smoothies are a very good treat as they're sweet and nutritious at the same time. Unfortunately many that you buy at restaurants are made with added sugar and other ingredients that really load up the calories.

When you're at home you can add fresh or frozen fruit with a splash of orange juice to make a nice dessert; you can also add protein powder for a nice meal replacement shake.

Most people want a taste of something sweet after dinner and the problem often is that they go overboard with cake, ice cream, and things like these. But a fruit smoothie can mean a nice dessert that's far fewer calories than that hunk of cake or dish of ice cream.

When you use the right tools like a grill or rotisserie you're going to rely a lot less on frying and cooking everything in grease and oil. This will mean fewer calories overall, since fat contains quite a lot of calories.

A steamer.

How do you fix vegetables as a side dish for dinner? Many people just reheat frozen vegetables or use something that's covered in cheese and butter. Usually they do this because boiling vegetables makes them mushy and unappetizing.

But a good vegetable steamer can make your vegetables tender without being mushy and keep them crisp but fully cooked. You can add a pat of butter or some butter sprinkles for added flavor but don't need to soak them in butter to bring out the flavor. You can also add garlic or other seasoning blends as well.

A good vegetable steamer is very inexpensive and can fit a typical saucepan. Steaming vegetables usually takes only ten or fifteen minutes so they can be ready rather quickly. And steaming keeps in all the good vitamins and minerals the boiling takes away, so there are a myriad of reasons why you should add this to your list of needed kitchen items!

USE SEASONING BLENDS AND MIXES

Do you have a hard time cooking dishes that actually taste good without using butter or oil? Is this because you never really learned how to season certain dishes and ingredients?

Many people today are in the same boat. Cooking has become a lost art, what with so many people finding that they need to work outside the home and with drive-through restaurants available on just about every street corner. Why go through all the time and effort needed to learn how to cook when you're already exhausted at the end of the day and when those drive-through places are so convenient?

But when you learn what seasonings go with what dishes and how to mix and blend them you might find that cooking is much more enjoyable. However for those who are just too pressed for time to learn all these details, you're actually in luck. Many seasoning blends and mixes, as well as marinades, are readily available at the supermarket.

Here's an example of what we're talking about. Suppose you come across a recipe for chicken thighs that instructed you to crush several cloves of garlic and then to rub this together with a certain measure of paprika. This paste then gets rubbed onto chicken thighs which you cook in a slow cooker.

This is a nice recipe; paprika and garlic actually complement each other very well. But who wants to measure out something as small and as pungent as garlic? Not to mention mixing everything together with your fingers - it could take days to get the smell off of your skin.

But if you were to browse the seasoning section of your supermarket you might notice a seasoning blend meant for rotisserie chicken, which is a mixture of paprika and garlic and a few other elements. You can forego that recipe mentioned above completely and just use that seasoning mixture, easily sprinkling it on those chicken thighs and keeping it off your fingers. How simple is that?

If you take the time to look through these items in your supermarket you may see all sorts of offerings by way of seasoning and marinades. If you make a pot of homemade chili you're going to be able to control exactly what goes into it, meaning you can put in more beans and less meat to save calories. Your supermarket has all sorts of seasoning envelopes for chili, from mild to hot, so you don't need to guess about how to make it taste good as well.

When using a tabletop grill you may want to put the meat into a marinade first; marinating it overnight will make it the tastiest. The supermarket has premade

marinades in all sorts of flavors, from steakhouse to Caribbean jerk to chipotle and lime.

These mixes and marinades usually state what type of meat they work best on; some are good for chicken and pork, some are better for steaks and beef, and some are fine for just about anything. Check the labels so you aren't left with any guesswork in this regard either.

Bringing out the flavor in foods is actually very easy when you use these items, and it makes cooking easier as well. How hard is it to put some meat in a marinade and then put it on a grill? Or to put a bunch of ingredients in a slow cooker and sprinkle in an envelope of seasoning?

If you've been resisting the use of these items because you just weren't confident of how the food would turn out, set that thinking aside and give them a try. Read the labels and the instructions on your cooking tools and just follow them closely. Don't be afraid of trying new things; cooking is often a "by the seat of your pants" process where you can try different things and adjust items to your own tastes.

Those seasoning mixes and spice blends and marinades are there for a reason. They're created by those who know how to cook and how to mix up these ingredients, so why not let them do the work for you?

FOLLOW RECIPES

Flying by the seat of your pants when it comes to cooking can be a good thing if it means being able to make adjustments and changes so that your dishes are healthier and tastier as well. But unfortunately people often make adjustments and cook according to what is easiest or just how they've learned growing up.

This often means just throwing meat in a pan with some butter or oil and frying it up or deep frying chicken and other items. Vegetables are boiled and then soaked in butter as well.

People often cook this way because they just don't know how to do anything else. They don't know how to create dishes that are tasty and healthy.

This is where recipes can come into play. A recipe is very good if it teaches you how to prepare foods in a way that omits all the butter and oil you might otherwise use.

When you're worried about your child's weight you may also want to get them involved in cooking so that they may be better able to make nutritious choices. When they've helped prepare a meal they're more likely to look forward to eating it, and choosing recipes they want to try can also get them more involved in cooking. They too can learn how to use different methods and kitchen tools to save themselves some trouble as well as fat and calories.

Tips for making recipes easier.

You might shy away from using recipes because it means measuring everything. One problem with this is that you may always be hunting for measuring cups and spoons and find it's just too much trouble.

Take the time to really organize your kitchen to get you started in this regard. It probably would only take you an hour or two which you can easily set aside on a weekend to go through your kitchen and get rid of everything you don't need to make room for the tools you do need. Move utensils that you rarely use to a place that's not so prominent. For example if you only use your corkscrew once or twice per year, put it in the pantry rather than allow it to take up drawer space. Look at all your little kitchen tools and gadgets and be honest about what ones you use regularly and which are just sitting there. A melon baller, pizza slicer, or spice grater may be just collecting dust. Put all these items in one bin or even an unused shoebox and put them away so they you can find them when you need them but so that they're not taking precious space at your fingertips.

There are usually other ways of making space for things that will allow you to cook healthy dishes quicker and easier. Get a container you can keep on the stovetop to store larger items such as spoons, spatulas, and ladles. This will free up drawer space and make finding other items easier. Go through your "junk drawer" and toss out what you know you won't be using regularly and move other items out of the kitchen. Keep batteries, matches, magnets, and items like these in a place in your pantry or other part of the house.

Toss out measuring cups or spoons where the measurements are worn off or if they can't be read. Think of purchasing new ones - they're usually a few dollars if even that. Most can be bought at the dollar or discount store. You don't need anything fancy or name brand; just some plastic ones are perfectly fine.

You might also want to consider getting some mixing bowls, cutting boards, and good knives as well. These are usually needed for many recipes and are easier to work with than just trying to chop vegetables with a steak knife using a dinner plate as a cutting board.

Plan ahead.

One good thing to do with recipes is to check what you're going to be preparing for the upcoming week and compare your recipes with what you have in your pantry. You can then make a shopping list and visit the supermarket. If you stick to the recipes you're going to be using throughout the week you won't let food go to waste and you won't be guessing as to what you need to have on hand.

You can also plan recipes that can be made in advance and just reheated for those busy weeknights when you're tired from working. A recipe for vegetarian lasagna may mean that you can portion it out and freeze it so that it just needs a few minutes in the microwave. You may also be able to make up batter for bran muffins and put that in the refrigerator for a week or so; when it's time to cook them you just pop them in the pan and bake them.

Following your recipes on the weekend when you have more time and making up dishes that can be frozen and reheated this way can really save you some effort throughout the week; if you're not rushed and frazzled after work you're going to be less likely to hit the drive-through for a quick meal.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Any one of these suggestions is probably going to be helpful when it comes to cooking in a healthier way that is also tasty and delicious. But to really be successful in the kitchen, you should consider putting all these together.

As an example, consider marinating some fish in a marinade mix and putting it on the tabletop grill while you steam some veggies. You can make up a dinner that's around 300 calories this way and that's still very filling.

Or make some vegetarian chili on the weekend and freeze it in individual portion sizes. Some corn muffins without added sugar are a nice addition and you can whip up this batter on the weekends as well. When you get home from work you just pop this in the microwave and dollop up some batter in muffin pans. The muffins cook while the chili reheats and you have a low-cal, high fiber dinner in a matter of minutes.

You might realize that you make some mistakes along the way; you try a recipe and no one is crazy about it, or you try a marinade on a particular cut of meat and it just doesn't seem to thrill you.

But cooking healthy is an important part of one's health overall. What we put into our bodies has a lot to do with how that body functions and operates. When we eat well we function well, but when we load ourselves up with butter, oil, sugar, and other such elements we have a tendency to function poorly.

Obesity is a problem that's just not going to go away anytime soon, but taking responsibility for how one cooks at home can do much to keep it at bay. So consider these different tips and try to implement them, even if it's one at a time, and see if you can't come up with dishes that are tasty and delicious and yet healthy at the same time.