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Taking the Lead Out

How to convert your favorite recipes into low-fat dishes

Almost every magazine you open today will have an article about cutting fat in your diet, or how to eat better to obtain a leaner body and better health. The problem is, they frequently do not give you specific instructions on how to convert your favorite recipes to low-fat versions. Following are some suggestions.

BAKED GOODS:

- Substitute 2 egg whites for 1 whole egg to lower cholesterol.
- Replace whole milk in pancakes with nonfat milk, soy milk, rice beverage, or fruit juice.
- Use 1/4 cup canola or safflower oil instead of a stick of butter.
- Use 1/4 to 1/2 cup of applesauce or apple juice concentrate instead of sugar (the amount depends on how sweet you like foods and the amount of moisture your recipe calls for).
- Use applesauce or plain yogurt for all or 2/3rds of the oil or butter in muffins and quick breads.
- Use whole wheat, quinoa, brown rice flour or other alternate grain flours instead of bleached and enriched white flour. Be sure to cut heavy flours with lighter ones so the baked good isn't too heavy; i.e., use part whole wheat flour (heavy) with part quinoa (light).

SOUPS, SAUCES & DRESSINGS:

- Use defatted chicken broth or "Take Stock," available in the freezer of your grocery store.
- Use arrowroot to thicken sauces and gravies instead of flour and butter roux. If you are using arrowroot instead of cornstarch it will take almost twice as much; add slowly so it does not clump, or create a paste using a little water first with the arrowroot.
- Cut in half the amount of oil you use in dressings by using a flavorful oil such as extra-virgin olive oil or oils seasoned with herbs, garlic and peppers.
- Instead of mayonnaise or sour cream, use non-fat yogurt or low-fat buttermilk in dressings and dips.
- Use "Skinny Haven" or "Weight Watchers" individual packets of dressings that are portion and calorie controlled when eating out or on the road travelling.
- Try to stick to the no-oil dressings, since the low calorie oil options often come up high in total fat due to the low calorie and high fat gram ratio for the serving.

MAIN DISHES:

- Use 1/2 fat free cheese and 1/2 skim mozzarella when trying to cook a product that requires the cheese to melt; i.e., pizza, lasagna, burritos, nachos.

- Use fat-free cream cheese instead of light or regular. For more flavor, add some simply fruit or 100% real fruit spread to it on your toasted bagel.
- Cut in half the amount of oil you use to saute or use a "Tefal" pan, which requires no oil and is truly non-stick.
- When stir-frying, for a different flavor, saute using a little canola oil and sesame oil and garlic to saute, then steam using chicken broth that is defatted.
- Replace sour cream with non-fat yogurt, especially when you top potatoes. Add a little salsa to the yogurt, steamed vegetables, and some skim mozzarella cheese to top the potato and you now have a good healthy meal.
- Replace regular ricotta cheese in lasagna with cottage cheese, tofu or lite ricotta cheese.
- Use herbs and spices generously to season your dishes, even if it's a bowl of brown rice. Some other seasoning options include soy sauce, tamari, lemon juice, balsamic vinegar and mustard with herbs.
- Use lean ground turkey instead of ground beef in spaghetti sauce, lasagna, tacos, burritos, or any other traditionally-beef dish.
- Watch your processed spaghetti sauces; quite a few of them are 40% total fat or higher. Calculate the percentage of fat from the information on the label and the following formula: number of fat grams listed on the box multiplied by 9 (cal/gram) times 100 to get % of total calories in the serving.

SNACKS & DESSERTS:

- A great snack or dessert is yogurt with a crunchy cereal (ie. Health Valley's Amaranth, Orangeola, Health Crunch, some of the low-fat or fat-free granola's or grape-nuts) and fresh fruit.
- Use a lowfat energy bar as a snack (i.e., Powerbar, Clif Bar, Xtrn, CytoBar, XL 40 to name a few).
- Use fat-free crackers with skim mozzarella cheese rather than regular crackers and cheese to reduce the total fat % of the snack.
- Replace regular cream cheese with light or fat free. If making a cheese cake use 1/2 light and 1/2 fat free to keep the needed consistency.
- Use tofu in desserts instead of cream cheese or eggs in custards, mousses and cheesecakes. Be sure to double the recipe on the spices and flavorings.
- Use half the coconut or nuts that are called for in the recipe.
- Use fat free cookies with ice milk as a "sweet tooth fix" after a meal, if fruit isn't an option.
- Angel food cake is an option lower in fat than most other cakes. Top with fresh strawberries and a dab of non-fat plain or vanilla yogurt.