

Rethinking Comfort Food

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Comfort food is defined as food that evokes a special memory, nostalgia or food that brings you joy. We often turn to these foods when we want to, as the name implies, feel comfort. This can be anything from wanting to feel warm and cozy on a cold day, having

chicken noodle soup when sick like we did as a child or wanting something to comfort us after a stressful day.

Typically, many of these foods are higher in calories and fat and low in nutrient-dense ingredients (think fruits, vegetables and whole grains). Although we should not feel guilty for indulging in these foods from time to time, it is still important to promote an overall healthful diet and instead practice moderation with many of these foods. However, it is possible to lighten up some of our favorite comfort foods to increase their nutritional benefit and be able to enjoy them more often without sacrificing flavor or the satisfaction that comes from eating them.

Sometimes all it takes is a few simple swaps or additions to a recipe to increase the nutritional value. Here are some easy ways we can lighten up some of our favorite comfort foods:

- Try oven frying foods in place of deep frying. This can be oven-fried chicken, crispy oven-fried fish or oven-fried fries. Most things that are fried can instead be made in the oven to produce the same crispy coating with all the flavor, but without all the added fat from the excess oil used to fry foods.
- An air fryer is another convenient option to replace deep frying foods. It creates crispy foods quickly by circulating hot air at high speeds with minimal oil, making this a much lighter option. The cooking options are endless and include everything from savory foods like diced potatoes or a whole chicken to sweet foods like doughnuts.
- Add beans to soups, chili, casseroles, enchiladas and any other dishes where you feel like they would work to add lean protein and extra fiber. The options are endless!
- Grate or finely chop vegetables to add into sauces, casseroles, soups and chili. You can use anything from zucchini, carrots, butternut squash to bell peppers. The addition of these extra vegetables bulks the recipe up with fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.
- Use thinly sliced sweet potatoes as a swap for tortilla chips when making nachos. This will give your nachos a boost of fiber and the antioxidant beta carotene.
- Swap plain nonfat Greek yogurt for mayonnaise and sour cream. You'll get the same creamy texture without the extra fat, plus the added benefit of calcium and protein from the Greek yogurt. Use in place of sour cream on top of chili, nachos, baked potatoes or your other favorite foods. Greek yogurt also works in place of mayonnaise in dips, creamy salad dressings or in tuna salad.



- Replace half of the pasta used in recipes like spaghetti with “zoodles”, spiralized zucchini, or spaghetti squash.
- Use 1% or skim milk in place of heavy cream and whole milk in cream soups, macaroni and cheese and cream sauces.
- You can use pureed vegetables or potatoes instead of cream to thicken up soups too.
- Make a loaded baked potato but swap the butter, sour cream, cheese and bacon bits for a turkey and vegetable chili with a light sprinkle of grated cheese and a dollop of nonfat plain Greek yogurt.
- To add more whole grains to your diet swap white rice for brown rice or quinoa.
- Try replacing all or a portion of the butter or oil in your baking recipe with equal amounts of unsweetened applesauce. It decreases the heaviness and fat content, while keeping it moist.

Hopefully you’ll give some of these ideas a try or use them as ideas to help update your recipes to create your own lightened up versions of your favorite comfort foods.

Make Your Goals SMART

The start of January 2022 marks the time of year when we start thinking about resolutions and the goals we want to accomplish for the new year. But how often do we set lofty goals only to find ourselves forgetting about them or becoming discouraged because we are not seeing the results we expected? There are several ways to change our approach to goal setting that will help us to better accomplish them.

Goals should be specific and attainable. Choosing to make SMART goals helps turn vague goals like “eat healthy” or “exercise more” into specific and realistic goals. The SMART goal strategy creates a checklist of criteria that your goal should meet:

- Specific

- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

With this approach you are defining what you want to do and how you will measure your progress.

Specific: Describe exactly what the new habit will be. Instead of “I will eat more fruits and vegetables” be specific and choose something like “ $\frac{2}{3}$ of my plate will be filled with fruits and vegetables at each meal.”

Measurable: Being able to measure progress and hold yourself accountable helps keep you on track. Using a journal or app can help with this. For example, if you are trying to be more active, you could set a goal of walking for 30 minutes 5 times per week and then write down your activity each day or use a fitness app to track your progress.

Attainable: Make sure you have the tools, information or resources to reach your goal. Do you need a gym membership or certain workout equipment at home for your goal or measuring tape if you’re tracking your measurements?

Realistic: Being realistic helps avoid setbacks. If you dislike running, don’t set a goal to run a marathon or choose weight loss that is too rapid for the specified timeframe (e.g. 10 pounds in 2 weeks).

Time-bound: Goals without starting points and deadlines are easy to put off and forget about. Spell out when you will start and how often you will do it. Such as, consume fish two times per week starting this Monday.

Remember: goals do not have to be related to weight loss or exercise. Instead, choose something that is important to you. Maybe you want to read more in 2022 or save up for a vacation. Being SMART with your goals can help build the framework for long-term success creating new healthy habits.



Featured Recipe

Oven-Baked Eggplant Parmesan

For complete recipe and nutrition facts: [Eating Well](#)

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Total time: 45 minutes

Servings: 6



INGREDIENTS

Canola or olive oil cooking spray
2 large eggs
2 tbsp water
1 cup panko breadcrumbs
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
1 tsp Italian seasoning
2 medium eggplants, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick slices
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground pepper
1 (24 oz.) jar no-salt-added tomato sauce
 $\frac{1}{4}$ fresh basil leaves, torn
2 cloves garlic, grated
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp crushed red pepper
1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese, divided

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Coat 2 baking sheets and a 9x13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Whisk eggs and water in a shallow bowl. Mix breadcrumbs, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese and Italian seasoning in another shallow dish. Dip eggplant in egg mixture, then coat with breadcrumb mixture and gently press to adhere.
3. Arrange eggplant in a single layer on prepared baking sheets. Spray both sides of the eggplant with cooking spray. Bake, flipping the eggplant halfway during the time, until tender and lightly browned, about 30 minutes. Then season with salt and pepper.
4. Meanwhile mix tomato sauce, basil, garlic and crushed red pepper in a bowl.
5. Spread about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sauce in the prepared baking dish. Arrange half the eggplant slices over the sauce. Spoon 1 cup sauce over the eggplant and sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mozzarella cheese. Top with remaining eggplant, sauce and cheese.
6. Bake until the sauce is bubbling, and the top is golden about 20 to 30 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with more basil before serving if desired.

