

Tips and Tricks for eating from your pantry:

While we stay home to stay healthy, we find ourselves with a unique challenge: cooking meals without the benefit of picking up fresh produce and meats whenever we choose. Cooking from pantry stable items is not all rice and beans—it can be a fun opportunity to try new recipes.

Today's tips and recipe focus on using dried fruits in place of fresh. Just like fresh fruit, dried can provide the same vitamins, minerals and fiber. Although, it can be easy to overindulge in the sugars of fruit when dried, they add interest and nutrition to many dishes.

Tips:

Add dried blueberries or banana flakes to your morning cereal for more flavor, nutrition, and texture.

Raisins or dried cherries add interest to baked goods such as sweet breads and cinnamon rolls.

Dried apricots, sliced thin, pair wonderfully in a salad with walnuts and blue cheese.

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Jessica has a Bachelors of Science in Dietetics and has been providing nutrition education professionally since 2010. You may see her at the RiverWalk Center for Healthy Aging or running STEP's Healthy Aging through Local Harvest (HATLH) program.

Blueberry Pancake Overnight Oats

Ingredients

yields (1) 8oz serving

1/2 c. old fashioned oats

1/2 c. milk (dairy or dairy-free)

1 1/2 tsp. chia seeds
(optional, but recommended)

1/4 c. blueberries
(dried, frozen or fresh)

1 Tbsp. pure maple syrup

Method

Place half of the blueberries in the bottom of a small, sealable container. (A canning jar is a good option.) Mix oats, chia seeds, maple syrup, and remaining berries together and add to container. Pour milk of your choice on top of oat mixture. Seal container and refrigerate for at least 6 hours, or overnight. Serve cold.

Variations:

Tropical - replace blueberries with shredded coconut and canned pineapple, use coconut milk.

PB cup - omit blueberries. Add 1 Tbsp peanut butter and 1 Tbsp cocoa powder to oat mixture. Top with mini chocolate chips.



Crispy Baked French Fries

Ingredients

Makes about 4 servings

4 large Russet potatoes

3 Tbsp olive oil

1/4 tsp salt

Method

Wash potatoes well—do not peel.

Fill a large bowl with very cold water.

Cut potatoes into desired “french fry” shape/size and place into cold water. Soak for 30 – 60 minutes.

Preheat oven to 375°.

Remove from water and dry very well.

Toss potatoes with olive oil and salt and spread in even layer on a large baking sheet.

Bake for 20 minutes. Stir and flip fries. Increase oven temp to 400° and continue baking for 20-40 minutes, or until golden brown and crispy.

Serve immediately.



With most of us continuing to quarantine, we may be wary of ordering takeout or picking up fast food. Or, you may find yourself eating more fast food as a way to get out of the house. Either way, home-made oven fries are a great option for a healthy, comfort food made at home.

These fries use a small amount of healthy fat, and only a dash of salt to achieve the classic French fry taste and texture. The skins are left on to increase the fiber and nutrition in your French fries – potato skins are rich in potassium and Vitamin C!

Don't skip soaking your raw potatoes. The short time in a water bath removes a lot of starch and allows for that classic crisp texture. However, be sure to dry your potatoes thoroughly with towels or even a salad spinner before baking. Too much water will steam your fries, instead of roasting.

Without regular access to the supermarket, you may find yourself eating more canned and frozen meals. While canned vegetables and frozen dinners are a great alternative to get variety and essential nutrition during quarantine, they tend to be high in sodium.

High sodium intake is directly related to high blood pressure and can also affect water retention. Currently, the American Heart Association recommends healthy adults limit sodium intake to 1500mg or less per day.

Reading the nutrition facts label on processed food is the best way to keep track of how much sodium you're eating. However, reading food labels can be confusing - with many similar terms being used in different ways. The best way to keep track is to count the mg on the back of a product, but there is also information on the front!

Here are some common sodium-related terms you may see on food packages, with a short explanation:

Sodium-free – Less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving and contains no sodium chloride

Very low sodium – 35 milligrams or less per serving

Low sodium – 140 milligrams or less per serving

Reduced (or less) sodium – At least 25% less sodium per serving than the usual sodium level (meaning on the unaltered version of the same product)

Light (for sodium-reduced products) – If the food is “low calorie” and “low fat” and sodium is reduced by at least 50% per serving

Light in sodium – If sodium is reduced by at least 50% per serving

These low sodium products are generally much healthier for us, but for a palate used to salty foods they can seem bland. Instead of reaching for the saltshaker, try:

Adding fresh herbs or vegetables to tuna or chicken salad can add flavor and texture.

Spices or spice blends such as Mrs. Dash can replace the saltshaker (even just black pepper!).

Strong tasting condiments such as vinegars, hot sauce, mustard, or horseradish can be used in small amounts for a punch of flavor.

Citrus juices, like that squeeze of lemon on frozen fish, can add a brightness that more salt couldn't copy.

For more information and recipes, visit The American Heart Association's website:

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/sodium>