

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Cincinnati Chili

When one looks at ancient writings related to health and wellness up to the current day's scientifically proven medical professional guidance, we see the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables to promote optimal health, ward off ailments (ancient times), and lower the risk of diseases front and center. The importance of fruits and vegetables in the diet has stood the test of time and is consistent in all cultures. In fact, when we really think about it, in relation to all the diets through the years—the good (science based) ones like the DASH and Mediterranean diets to even the “fads” like the cabbage soup diet or fruit cleanse all seem to have one thing in common: they promote produce. The reason for this is simple, for the most part they are high in key vitamins and minerals, low in calories by weight, and a great source of fiber to help us feel full. But if you really think about it, they are also the foods that can be readily eaten without cooking. When one really looks at it, they are truly the original convenience foods.



So why do we, as a nation, still don't eat the recommended number of fruits and vegetables? There's public health messaging out there promoting making half the plate fruits and vegetables for most meals as well as guidance from the Department of Defense to aim for 8 servings per day of fruits and vegetables and even provides graphics of 2 servings for each meal and one serving at each snack. Perhaps one reason could be that people may be bored with the way they think fruits and vegetables should be consumed. For example, vegetables are either eaten as salads or served warm as a side and fruits are consumed cold.

Because the goal is to consume more fruits and vegetables, here are some interesting strategies to add them to your meals and snacks:

1. Add chopped mushrooms to ground meat dishes
2. Double up on the number of servings of vegetables at mealtimes
3. When you are hungry between meals, reach for piece of fruit or chopped vegetables first and most of the time. Many have said, this is a great way to mindfully make the distinction between hunger and cravings.
4. Use a combination of fresh, canned and frozen produce in dishes to cut down on the workload of preparing meals
5. Mix berries into your typical salad in place of croutons
6. Try grilling fruits and vegetables. Grilled peaches and pineapple are delicious!
7. Add fruits into entrées with meat for a sweet and savory dish
8. Use pureed fruit as a condiment
9. Add fermented vegetables such as kimchi or sauerkraut to your meal pattern to add a bit more flavor

This meal uses a few of the strategies above as an example of how easy and interesting meals can be when loaded with produce

Ingredients: 4 servings

- 1 lb. of lean ground beef
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- ½ green pepper, chopped
- ½ red pepper, chopped
- 1 can low-sodium kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tbsp. vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 14-15 oz. can tomato sauce
- 1 6 oz. can tomato paste
- 1 tsp. dark chocolate, cocoa powder, or 1 oz. piece of a dark chocolate candy bar (72% cocoa or higher)
- 1 tbsp. + 1 tsp. chili powder
- ¾ tsp. cumin
- ¼ tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground allspice (can substitute cloves—just a little different taste)
- 2 bay leaves
- 8 oz. whole wheat spaghetti noodles
- 10 oz. match stick carrots (optional)
- 4 oz. sharp cheddar cheese (optional)
- 1 bunch of green onions

Directions:

1. Place the chopped vegetables in a microwave safe dish with ¼ cup of water and the bay leaf. Cover and microwave for 6-8 minutes until tender.
2. While the vegetables are cooking, begin cooking the ground beef in a large sauce pan on medium heat. Cook the ground beef until no longer pink. Drain the grease. Turn heat to low. Quickly remove the cooked vegetables from the microwave add them (undrained) along with the bay leaf to the cooked beef.
3. Add the tomato sauce and gently mix into the beef. Add the drained kidney beans, and tomato paste. Gently mix until the
4. paste is incorporated. Add the spices. Mix and then turn the heat up to medium and cook for an additional 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burning and sticking.
5. While the chili is cooking, cook the pasta according to package directions.
6. Add the cocoa or piece of dark chocolate to the chili and mix in until incorporated or melted.
7. Place ¼ of the cooked pasta on a plate and top with ¼ of the chili. Garnish with carrots (optional), ¼ of the shredded cheese, and a sprinkle of green onion. Serve with a piece of fresh fruit or a small garden salad to round out the meal.

DISCLAIMER:

THIS RECIPE DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN ENDORSEMENT BY DOD OF ANY INDIVIDUAL VENDOR. ANY PRODUCT OF SIMILAR SPECIFICATION MAY BE USED TO MAKE THIS HEALTHY CHOICE MEAL.