



Thinking Outside the Box!



Saucy Beef and Noodles

In setting the goal to move the needle, some choose more nutrient-dense foods rather than jumping in completely to eat a perfect diet. It's often the best strategy in achieving and maintaining a healthy eating pattern. One path to take this: aim to cook 2 more meals per week at home that include at least 4-5 food groups (fruits, vegetables, whole grain, dairy, and protein foods) and/or 2 or more servings of vegetables.

Although all Americans know that fruits and vegetables are important in their diet, current data shows the average daily American consumption still falls below the recommended amount. One reason consumption of produce (fresh, canned, and frozen) is less than stellar is our over-reliance on fast foods. Perhaps it's because of our busy schedules, the perceived cost of eating healthy, and fears of actually getting into the kitchen to cook.

Let's face it, as we have come to rely on prepared foods, our nations' cooking skills have decreased. Combine this with all of the cooking shows featuring beautifully prepared dishes with pricey ingredients, and the thought of trying seems futile. This is not the case!

Removing the entertainment factor of pretty, gourmet dishes, the belief that eating healthy is too expensive, and the burden of time; all Americans can easily nourish themselves. Adopting the strategies of stocking our homes with economical pantry and freezer staples, choosing recipes that are inclusive of as many food groups as possible, and focusing on quick dishes that make waiting in a drive-thru seem wasteful, and focusing on the flavor factor over looks, every American can improve the nutrition quality of their diet.

For those days where you don't know what to make for dinner and don't have the energy, know that you can rely on frozen vegetables, whole grains like pasta, quinoa and brown rice, lean ground meats (that can be thawed quickly in the microwave), low-sodium canned vegetables, diced tomatoes, and even instant potatoes to prepare a comforting, nourishing dish in minutes. Most times, a meal prepared at home will be higher in nutritional quality and lower in calories, especially when they are made up of the suggested items above.

This featured meal takes advantage of all pantry staples. Use this as a roadmap for future skillet, quick dishes. For those that are pressed for what to cook for lunch, consider this dish for the office a couple of days of the week. This dish also does great for single serving, freezing for that hungry teenager after school.



Ingredients: 4 servings

- 1 lb. very lean ground beef
- 8 oz. whole wheat egg noodles
- 1 cup frozen peas
- ¾ cup frozen carrots
- 2 tsp. olive oil
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. + 2 tsp. all-purpose flour
- 2 bay leaves (optional)
- 2 garlic cloves minced or 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 4 oz. canned mushroom slices, drained
- 1½ cups skim milk

Directions:

1. In a large skillet, begin browning the ground beef over medium heat. While the meat is browning, in a microwave-safe dish add the peas and carrots and microwave according to package directions.
2. In a large sauce pan, cook the noodles according to package directions. Once the vegetables and noodles are cooked, drain and set aside.
3. Once the meat is cooked through (do not drain the fat), add the olive oil, onion powder, and pepper then gently mix into the beef. Sprinkle flour over the beef mixture, turn the heat down to medium and toss to cook for an addition one minute. Whisk in the milk, mushrooms, salt, garlic, and the bay leaves (optional) then turn the heat up to medium high.
4. Whisking gently, bring the mixture to a low boil and then turn heat back down to medium. Cook an additional 2 minutes until the mixture thickens.
5. Add the noodles and vegetables to meat sauce and then toss to coat.
6. Serve ¼ of the mixture on a plate or a bowl.

Tips:

- Any type of lean meat or poultry can be used in this dish.
- In a pinch, used canned vegetables. Just drain them and add in step 2.
- Instead of noodles, you can put the meat and sauce over instant mashed potatoes.

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.

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