

Healthy Cooking Made Easy: How To Succeed Without Really Trying!

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These meals are very low in calorie density and very high in nutrient density so you can eat all you want till you are comfortably full without having to worry about portions size or going hungry. They are all based on my lecture, Calorie Density: How To Eat more, Weigh Less & Live Longer. All the recipes are made from the 10 Healthiest Packaged Foods and use the 5 Basic Ingredients. So, lets review those first.

The 10 Healthiest Packaged Foods

The healthiest foods are the foods that come straight out of the garden and are consumed in their natural form or as simply prepared as possible. These foods are fresh fruits, vegetables, starchy vegetables, legumes, and intact whole grains and should be the focus of any healthy diet.

Packaged and processed foods are usually loaded with fats, free oils, salt, refined sugars/sweeteners and refined carbohydrates/grains, They are also almost always calorie dense. However, there are some packaged and processed foods that can be included as part of a healthy diet. And in fact, keeping some of them around and on hand can actually make following a healthy diet, easier. This way, no matter how much time you have, you can always put together a healthy meal very quickly. Also, all meals are prepared in a large pasta "style" stock pot, which will make plenty for dinner and enough for leftovers.

Here they are.

1) Frozen Vegetables

Vegetables are the most nutrient dense food there is and including more of them in your diet is a key to improving the nutritional quality of your diet. Unlike many canned vegetables, plain frozen individual vegetables usually have no other added ingredients. Frozen peas and beans may have some added salt, but they usually make my 1:1 sodium/calorie guideline. Frozen vegetables can easily be thawed and including as part of a healthy recipe and/or meal. These are one of the main ingredients in my Basic Recipes

Caution: Be careful of all the new fancy frozen vegetable mixes as many come with added sauces that can be high in salt, sugar and or fat. Look for the plain bags of single individual vegetables of vegetable blends.

2) Frozen Fruits

The same reasoning for frozen vegetables also applies to frozen fruits. Look for the ones that contain just frozen fruit and avoid the ones with added sugars/sweeteners. Frozen berries are one of my favorites to keep on hand. Fresh berries are very seasonal, and they also often mold and rot quickly and easily. Frozen berries do not and are available year round. In addition, you can often find wild berries, including blueberries and strawberries, which are often sweeter and more nutrient dense.

3) Quick Cooking Brown Rice

My favorite kind of rice, is basmati brown rice. I love the taste and the aroma, especially when it is cooking. It smells like popcorn popping. However, I do not always have the 40 minutes to prepare the basmati brown rice from scratch. Nor do I always have some cooked up ahead of time. The solution, is anyone of the varieties available of “quick cooking” brown rice. While I do not usually like to promote a specific brand, one brand that I do prefer is Success Quick Cooking Brown Rice. This brand and variety has to be the simplest and easiest version of quick cooking brown rice ever invented. Many other versions require the measurement of water and rice (which can be troublesome for some). :) However, with this version all you do is place a pre-measured bag in a pot of boiling water for 10 minutes and wah-lah!, perfect brown rice. For those of you who want to avoid using the plastic bag, just remove the rice from it and cook in boiling water. You can now also get frozen pre-cooked whole grain brown rice that is also quick and simple to prepare.

4) No Salt Added Shelf Stable Beans

Next to green leafy veggies and vegetables, beans may be one of the most nutrient rich foods there is. They are rich in nutrients and fiber, very filling and relatively low in calorie density. The problem with beans for many of us is that most beans can take hours to cook and most canned beans are extremely high in sodium. So, for those in a hurry, the solution is to buy no salt added shelf-stable beans. Again, while I do not like to promote a specific brand, Eden Foods canned beans are one of the best out there and they are also the only canned beans that are BPA free. There are about 12 varieties of beans available from them, including Kidney, Black, Garbanzo, Pinto, Adzuki, etc. Not only are they available online, and in health food stores, I also find most local grocery stores are now carrying them. Just open a can and add them to your favorite dish, recipe or meal. These are one of the main ingredients in my Basic Recipes. There are also now a few varieties of no-salt added, organic beans that are packed in an aseptic shelf-stable container that are sold by Fig Foods and by Whole Foods.

5) No Salt Added Shelf-Stable Tomato Products

Tomatoes make a great base for many dressings, sauces, soups and meals (i.e., stews, chili's, etc). However, good fresh tomatoes are not always available year round and some of the one that are available in the off-season are literally tasteless. In addition, while there are some canned varieties that are salt free, most canned tomato products are extremely high in sodium and contain BPA. However, one brand I prefer is POMI brand tomato products as they are both salt free, shelf stable and BPA free. While these tomato product could never substitute for a fresh "in season" tomato on a salad, they can help make excellent soups, sauces, and meals when fresh tomatoes are out of season or when you are in a pinch. These are one of the main ingredients in my Basic Recipes. If you can't find POMI Tomatoes, look for any brand of no salt added canned tomatoes.

6) Intact Whole Grains (Buckwheat, Brown Rice, Oatmeal, etc)

Whole grains that are consumed in their "intact" form are low in calorie density, high in satiety, nutrient rich and shelf stable. They are easy to cook (just add water) and can be the base of many healthy meals and dishes. They also make great additions to soups and

salads. Oatmeal, buckwheat, and barley all make a great breakfast and a great way to start the day. Brown rice, cracked wheat, quinoa, and/or millet mixed with vegetables make a great meal, side dish and or salad. My favorites are the ones that I can cook from start to end in 10 minutes. These include oats, buckwheat, quinoa and millet.

7) Whole Grain Pasta

The problem with many whole grain processed products (like bread, dry cereals, bagels, tortilla's and crackers) is that even though they are whole grain, they are still calorie dense. One of the only exceptions is whole grain pasta. The reason is, when you cook whole grain pasta, it absorbs some of the water it is cooked in, which is absorbed into the structure of the pasta, lowering its calorie density. Foods with high water content are lower in calorie density and generally higher in satiety.

So, unlike most processed whole grains, which have a calorie density of 1200-1500 calories per pound, the calorie density of most cooked whole grain pasta is the same as most intact whole grains and starchy vegetables, which is around 500-600 calories per pound. It is also very quick and easy to cook and can be ready in around 10 minutes. Mix in some fresh or frozen vegetables, some POMI no salt added tomatoes and some fresh spices and you have a healthy, nutritious and filling meal.

8) Dried Fruit

Dried fruit is nature's candy. Unlike fresh fruit, it is shelf stable and will not spoil easily. Adding small amounts of dried fruit to dishes can add both nutrition and sweetness. A few raisins or dates can really sweeten up a bowl of fruit and they also go great in a bowl of whole grain cereal like oatmeal or as part of a dessert like baked apples. In addition, they make great additions by adding a little sweetness to a large vegetables salad, or even some cooked dishes like stews and rice.

However, due their high calorie density, go easy on them and think of them more as a condiment. Dried fruit is around 1200 calorie per pound where is most fresh fruit is under 300 calories per pound

Grapes 300 cal/lbs
Raisins 1357 cal/lb

Plumes 200 cal/lb
Prunes 1100 cal/lb

9) Unsalted Raw Nuts/Seeds and Nut/Seed Butter

Raw nuts and seeds, and the "butters" made from them, are rich in nutrients especially minerals. A few of them, like walnuts, flax & chia seeds are also excellent sources of the omega 3 essential fat. They are also shelf stable and will not spoil easily. They can add creaminess and texture to some homemade dressings and dips/spreads and/or soups. I sometimes make a salad dressing that is made from a little tahini (sesame seed butter) mixed with lemon and water. I also add a small amount of tahini to blended garbanzo beans to add some texture to my homemade hummus.

However, due to their extremely high calorie density, go very easy on them especially if weight is an issue for you. I recommend consuming no more than 1-2 oz a day at most. If you are struggling with your weight, I recommend either eliminating them or limiting them even more, to no more than 1 oz 2-5x a week. And, when you do use them, make sure you mix them with something low in calorie density, like vegetables or fruits.

10) Salt Free Spices/Seasonings/Herbs

As you decrease the amount of salt, sugar and oil in your diet, you will begin to appreciate the wonderful natural flavors of food. However, some people still like to add a little "spice" to their life. Fortunately, there are many salt-free spices, seasonings and blends available. Probably the most popular one is Mrs. Dash, which has many varieties available. In addition, for those of you who are not a chef and not familiar with the different flavor combination's of spices, you can now buy many salt free blends that can help. There are pre-mixed blends of salt-free Italian, Mexican, Indian, Southern and many other blends available.

There you go. My favorite 10 packaged staple foods that are not only good for you and can be included as part of a healthy diet. And in fact, keeping some of them around and on hand, can actually make following a healthy diet, easier.

NOTE: Many of the above mentioned items can be found online at several websites. The first is VitaCost (www.vitacost.com) and offers shipping for \$4.99. They also often have coupons for free shipping. The second is Amazon (www.amazon.com). If you join Amazon Prime, which is \$75/yr, you also get free basic shipping. In addition, you can often find many of these at Buy The Case (www.buythecase.net).

The 5 Basic Ingredients

Most all my recipes consist of 5 basic ingredients and all meals can be cooked in around 5-15 minutes from start to end. All are prepared in a large pasta "style" pot.

The Basic 5 Ingredients

- 1) **Packaged Tomatoes No Salt Added** - 28 oz.
 - a. These can be tomatoes in cans or in the aseptic packaging (POMI).
 - b. Can be whole, chopped, diced or strained.

- 2) **Canned Beans, No Salt Added** - 14 oz
 - a. Any brand, any bean.

- 3) **Frozen Vegetables** – 1 lb bags
 - a. Individual vegetables and/or variety mixes without any of the sauce/spice packs
 - b. NOTE: to increase the nutrient density of each dish, add in an additional 4 oz of Frozen chopped greens to the above basic recipe

- 4) **A Cooked Whole Grain or Starchy Vegetables** (1.5- 2 cups cooked)
 - a. Cooked brown rice, potato, sweet potato, barley, etc
- 5) **Spice/Seasoning** (to taste)
 - a. Pre-mixed, salt free, spices make adding flavor simple.

By changing the type of bean, type of vegetables, the type of starch and the seasoning, you can come up with different dishes. I make everything salt free and no salt added. You are welcome to sprinkle some salt on top at the table before eating if desired.

Remember, you do not have to measure and weigh food as these meals are very low in calorie density and very high in nutrient density so you can eat all you want till you are comfortably full without having to worry about portions size or going hungry. And, all recipes are just guidelines so they can be easily adapted to meet your own personal taste preferences.

All dishes make up enough for at least 2 people to get at least 2 meals (or more) and can easily be refrigerated and/or frozen for later use.

The Recipes

All recipes are for a double batch, which I always make. Not only do I have enough for today's meal but I also have enough to store some in the refrigerator and some in the freezer. This way, after a few days, I have several varieties of my meals readily available.

Dish 1 - Curried Indian Potato Stew

- 2 28 oz cans of chopped tomatoes
- 2 14 oz cans Garbanzo Beans
- 2 16 oz Frozen Cauliflower, peas (1/4 lb), onions (1/4 pound)
- 3-4 Cups Cooked Potatoes
- Salt Free Curry spice mix

Microwave, steam or boil the potatoes and when done, cut into 1 inch pieces. (You can dice the potatoes into 1 inch pieces and cook them in the pot in just enough water to cover them. When the potatoes are done, put all other ingredients in the pot and heat.) Add seasoning and top with fresh cilantro Enjoy.

Dish 2- Mexican Beans and Rice

- 2 28 oz cans chopped tomatoes
- 1 14 oz cans pinto beans, 1 can black beans
- 2 16 oz Frozen Pepper and Onion Mix, and Corn (1/2 lb)
- 3-4 Cups Cooked Brown Rice
- Mexican Spice Mix, Hot Sauce or salsa

Cook Brown rice in a separate pot. While brown rice is cooking, add all other ingredients to a large pot and heat. When rice is done place rice in a bowl. Top with beans, veggie and tomato mix. Top with fresh cilantro. Enjoy

Dish 3 - Italian Pasta Primavera

- 2 28 oz Can Chopped tomatoes
- 2 14 oz cans Dark Red Kidney Beans
- 2 16 oz Frozen Broccoli, Cauliflower, Carrots Mix (California Mix)
- 3-4 Cups Cooked Pasta (about 6-7 oz dry wt)
- Italian Spice Mix

Cook Pasta in separate pot. While pasta is cooking, put all other ingredients into large pot and heat. When pasta is done, rinse, and then mix together with the tomato vegetable mix. Top with seasonings and fresh parsley or basil. Enjoy!

Dish 4 - Longevity Soup

- 2 28 oz Cans Chopped Tomatoes
- 2 14 oz Cans of your favorite beans (I use kidney or garbanzo)
- 2 lb's of your favorite frozen veggies
- 3-4 cups of your favorite cooked unrefined complex carb (potato, swt potato, rice, etc)
- Your favorite seasoning (I use fresh ginger, garlic)

Place the tomatoes in large pot. Add in 2 28 oz cans of water. Then add in all other ingredients. Bring to a boil and then simmer 10 minutes. Enjoy

Dish 5- The Basic Burger Recipe

- 1 14 oz Can No Salt Added Kidney Beans, thoroughly drained and rinsed
- ½ Cup Rolled Oats, Dry
- ½ Cup Cooked Brown Rice
- 2 TB Canned Diced Tomatoes No Salt Added (or Salsa, BBQ Sauce, Ketchup, etc)
- Spice (No Salt Added Seasoning)

- Mash beans by hand with a potato masher (do not use a blender or food processor)
- Add in the remaining ingredients and mix thoroughly.
- Divide into 4 or 5 equal parts and shape each part into a burger.
- Let sit for a few minutes in the refrigerator to set.
- Grill (or broil) on each side till golden brown.

Dish 6 -The Burgers Variations

When making any variation, *always make a double batch*. When doing so, the second can of beans can be any other bean but for best results, make sure at least one can is kidney beans as they seem to produce the best burgers. Also, the second starch can be changed to almost any other cooked whole starch, such as sweet potato, quinoa, buckwheat, etc but always make sure to include the oats, as they are the best binder.

Mexican Burger

- 1 14 oz Can No Salt Added Kidney Beans
- 1 14 oz Can No Salt Added Pinto Beans or Black Beans
- 1 Cup Rolled Oats
- 1 Cup Cooked Brown Rice
- 4 TB Medium Salsa
- 2 Tbsp Mexican Seasoning (No Salt Added)

- Mash beans by hand with a potato masher (do not use a blender or food processor)
- Add in the remaining ingredients and mix thoroughly.
- Divide into 8 or 10 equal parts and shape each part into a burger.
- Let sit for a few minutes in the refrigerator to set.
- Grill (or broil) on each side till golden brown.

Indian Curry Burger

- 1 14 oz Can No Salt Added Kidney Beans
- 1 14 oz Can No Salt Added Garbanzo Beans
- 1 Cup Rolled Oats
- 1/2 Cup Cooked Brown Rice
- 1/2 Cup Mashed Cooked Sweet Potato
- 4 TB Medium Salsa
- 2 Tbsp Curry Powder

- Mash beans by hand with a potato masher (do not use a blender or food processor)
- Add in the remaining ingredients and mix thoroughly.
- Divide into 8 or 10 equal parts and shape each part into a burger.
- Let sit for a few minutes in the refrigerator to set.
- Grill (or broil) on each side till golden brown.

Dish 7 - Quick & Easy Oatmeal

- 1/2 Cup Regular Oats
- 1 Cup Water
- 1/2 Cup Frozen Mixed Berries
- 1 TB Raisins
- 2 tsp Ground Flax or Chopped Walnuts
- 1 Sliced Banana

- Bring water to a boil
- Add in oats, lower heat, and simmer 2-3 minutes till thick
- Add in berries, raisins, flax and banana.

Dish 8 - Quick and Easy Hummus

- 1 14 oz can Garbanzo Beans (no salt added or low sodium)
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 2 fresh garlic cloves or minced garlic
- 2 tsp tahini

- 1/4 tsp hot pepper flakes (optional)
- Mash beans by hand with a potato masher
- Add in water, lemon juice, garlic and tahini and mix well