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BAKED POTATO BAR MAKES A SIMPLE ENTREE

Are you tired of cooking? Do you feel like you have spent too many days in the kitchen? Well, start out the year with a good hot meal for your family or an excellent mid-day meal at the office that is nutritious, delicious, low-cost and easy to prepare!

Prepare one large baking potato for each person and toppings to be enjoyed by all. This vegetable, loved by all, is a good source of vitamins C and K, and the minerals iron, phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium. A four-ounce potato provides 238 calories and 9.5 grams of fiber. It naturally contains very little sodium or fat.

The toppings that we choose are the culprits. Depending on our potato toppers we add varying amounts of fat and calories. For instance, one tablespoon of each of the following toppings add the listed amount of calories: Butter/margarine 100 calories, Beef gravy 25 calories, Sour cream 25 calories, Bottled French dressing 50 calories, Mayonnaise 100 calories, Stewed tomatoes 10 calories, Yogurt 10 calories, Grated Parmesan cheese 25 calories, Herbs (such as basil, oregano, parsley, dill) 0 calories, Lemon juice 0 calories, and Whole milk 10 calories. True, some of these toppings I certainly wouldn't put on my baked potato, but often add to my potatoes when I mash them or prepare a salad.

For a family baked potato bar, bake your potatoes in the oven or in the microwave. For oven baking: wash the potatoes, pierce with a fork and place directly on the rack of a preheated 400° oven. For a moister potato rub the skin with oil, margarine or cooking spray and wrap with aluminum foil. Bake for approximately 45 minutes or longer until tender.

To microwave the potatoes: scrub the potatoes, pierce with a fork several times and place on paper towel in the microwave oven. One potato will take about 3-4 minutes on high, while 4 potatoes will take from 13-15 minutes on high. Let potatoes stand for 3 to 5 minutes. Microwave "standing time" is important to finish the baking process. Top with your choice from the potato bar. The broccoli-cheese bake can be served as a topper or can stand alone as a side dish for your meal.

HEARTY STUFFED POTATOES

4 large baking potatoes (about 2 pounds)
1 cup chopped fresh or frozen broccoli
1 small onion, chopped
1 cup chopped cooked ham or turkey
1 (2-ounce) jar diced pimento, drained
Yogurt Sauce

Bake 4 large potatoes and let stand for 5 minutes.

Place broccoli and onion in a 1-quart glass bowl. Cover with heavy-duty plastic wrap; fold back a small edge of wrap to allow steam to escape. Microwave at HIGH 4 minute or until tender. Drain. Add ham and pimento, and microwave at HIGH 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in Yogurt Sauce, and microwave at MEDIUM (50% power) 2 to 4 minutes or until mixture is thoroughly heated. (Do not boil.) Cut potatoes lengthwise, and top with mixture. Makes 4 servings.

YOGURT SAUCE

1 (8-ounce) carton plain fat-free yogurt
1/4 cup low-fat mayonnaise or salad dressing
1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar or cider vinegar
2 teaspoons cornstarch
1 teaspoon soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon dried whole thyme
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/4 teaspoon dried whole oregano
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Combine all ingredients, stirring until blended. Makes 1 1/4 cups.

BROCCOLI-CHEESE BAKE

1/2 pound fresh broccoli or 1 (10-ounce) package frozen cut broccoli
3/4 cup frozen small whole onions
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1/8 teaspoon salt
Dash pepper
2/3 cup skim milk
2 ounces Neufchatel cheese or a low-fat cream cheese
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

Remove the tough part of the fresh broccoli stalks. Cut the fresh broccoli stalks lengthwise into uniform spears, following the branching lines. Cut off buds and set aside. Cut the remaining part of the broccoli spears into 1-inch pieces.

In medium covered saucepan, cook the 1-inch fresh broccoli pieces in boiling, lightly salted water for 10 to 12 minutes or just till tender, adding the reserved broccoli buds for the last 5 minutes of the cooking time. (Or cook the frozen broccoli according to package directions.) Drain well. Cook the frozen onions according to package directions; drain well.

In small saucepan combine cornstarch, salt, and pepper; stir in skim milk. Cook and stir till thickened and bubbly. Cook and stir 1 to 2 minutes more. Reduce heat; stir in Neufchatel or low-fat cream cheese till smooth.

Combine broccoli, onions, and milk mixture; stir gently to mix. Turn into a 1-quart casserole dish. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake, uncovered, in a 350°F oven for 20 to 25 minutes or till the mixture is heated through. Makes 6 servings.

LASAGNA FILLING

Split each baked potato, add:

- 2 tablespoons cottage cheese
- 1 tablespoon favorite spaghetti sauce
- 2 tablespoons shredded Mozzarella cheese

Return potatoes to microwave. Bake on HIGH till mozzarella melts down over mixture. For 1 potato, microwave for 20-30 seconds on HIGH.

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION'S CHILI CON CARNE

- 1 cup dried pinto or kidney beans
- 3 cups water
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 2 cups onions, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 pound lean ground beef, optional
- 2 cups tomatoes, chopped
- 1 6-ounce can tomato paste
- 3/4 cup water
- 2-3 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 1-2 teaspoons garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 bay leaf

Place beans and 3 cups of water in saucepan. Bring to a boil and cook for 2 minutes. Do not drain. Set aside for 1 hour. Return beans to heat, adding water to cover, if necessary. Simmer 1 hour or until beans are tender. Drain and set aside.

In large, deep skillet or Dutch oven, heat the oil. Add onion and green pepper. Cook until onion is transparent. Add meat and brown. Pour off all fat. Add beans and remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 1½ hours, stirring occasionally. Remove bay leaf before serving. Makes 8 servings. NOTE: This recipe tastes equally as good without meat.

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