ENJOY THE TASTE OF EATING RIGHT

When it comes to choosing what to eat, nutrition is important but flavor is likely the true motivator and also the key to eating right, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. This March during National Nutrition Month® experiment with new flavors and flavor combinations in healthy meals and "Enjoy the Taste of Eating Right."

"According to consumer research, taste tops nutrition as the main reason why consumers buy one food over another. The foods we most commonly eat are often those we enjoy the most," says registered dietitian and Academy spokesperson Joy Dubost. "So make taste a priority when preparing nutritious meals."

Preparing meals can be healthy, rewarding and cost-effective. Dubost offers cooking tips to help enhance flavor without adding extra fat, calories or salt.

- To maximize food’s flavor and nutrition, choose high-quality ingredients at their peak quality, and be sure to store and handle foods properly.

- "Proper food handling and storage can enhance the natural flavors of food and keep nutrient loss to a minimum," Dubost says. "Overcooking can destroy both flavor and nutrients. So be sure to cook foods properly to retain nutrients and enhance flavor, color, texture and overall appeal."

Try some of these simple techniques to enhance flavor while experimenting with flavor combinations," Dubost says.

- Intensify the flavors of meat, poultry and fish with high-heat cooking techniques such as pan-searing, grilling or broiling.

- Pep it up with peppers. Use red, green and yellow peppers of all varieties—sweet, hot and dried. Or add a dash of hot pepper sauce.
Try grilling or roasting veggies in a very hot (450°F) oven or grill for a sweet, smoky flavor. Brush or spray them lightly with oil so they don’t dry out. Sprinkle with herbs.

Caramelize sliced onions to bring out their natural sugar flavor by cooking them slowly over low heat in a small amount of oil. Use them to make a rich, dark sauce for meat or poultry.

Simmer juices to make reduction sauces. Concentrate the flavors of meat, poultry and fish stocks. Reduce the juices by heating them—don’t boil. Then use them as a flavorful glaze or gravy.

For fuller flavors, incorporate more whole grains such as brown rice or quinoa, or experiment with amaranth and wild rice.

Add small amounts of ingredients with bold flavors like pomegranate seeds, chipotle pepper or cilantro.

Add a tangy taste with citrus juice or grated citrus peel: lemon, lime or orange. Acidic ingredients help lift and balance flavor.

Enhance sauces, soups and salads with a splash of flavored balsamic or rice vinegar.

Give a flavor burst with good-quality condiments such as horseradish, flavored mustard, chutney, wasabi, bean purees, tapenade and salsas of all kinds.

"These simple cooking steps can really transform your favorite meals and foods," Dubost says. "But keep in mind the average adult has 10,000 taste buds, and people sense the same foods differently. So don’t be afraid to try new foods, flavors and taste combinations. There’s truly a world of flavors to explore."

Enjoy these tasty and healthy recipes as part of the Academy’s National Nutrition Month® campaign.

**SPEEDY STIR-FRY RICE**

2 cups instant white or brown rice  
6 to 8 ounces frozen, precooked salad-size shrimp (optional)  
Nonstick cooking spray  
6 eggs, beaten  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
3 green onions, chopped  
1 1/2 cups frozen mixed vegetables, thawed  
4 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
Prepare rice according to package directions for the microwave.

If using shrimp, thaw in cold water; drain well and pat dry with paper towels.

Coat a wok or large skillet with the nonstick cooking spray, and heat until a drop of water sizzles. Scramble eggs in the wok or skillet and set aside.

Add the vegetable oil, green onions, vegetables and shrimp to the wok or skillet; stir-fry over high heat for about 5 minutes. Add the cooked rice, eggs and soy sauce; stir-fry for another 3 minutes. Makes 6 servings.

**CHICKPEA SALAD**

1 cup cooked or canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
3 tablespoons diced green bell pepper  
2 tablespoons peeled, seeded and diced cucumber  
1/2 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley  
1/2 cup diced tomato  
3 tablespoons snipped fresh dill or 1/4 teaspoon dried dill  
1/2 tablespoon lemon juice  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

In a medium-size bowl, combine all ingredients. Refrigerate for several hours to allow flavors to blend. Serve the salad on romaine lettuce leaves or in whole wheat pita bread pockets. You may also puree the salad in a food processor to make a chickpea spread.

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