

[IMAGE]

## **Eating Light, Eating Right**

### **Healthy Foods for a Healthy Summer**

By Keegan Sheridan, ND

Summertime is here, which means longer days, warmer temperatures and best of all, plenty of fresh produce. The beauty of summer's produce is not only in the breathtaking color that sweeps through grocery stores or farmer's markets. The true beauty is actually *within* the produce. Summer brings health-promoting antioxidants in berries, fiber in corn, vitamin A in peaches, and lycopene, also an antioxidant, in tomatoes and watermelon.

Even cooks with the most basic skills can take advantage of the wonders of summer foods and prepare delicious, good-for-you meals in just minutes. When you combine a little bit of education with simple preparation, it can be fun to mix and match flavor combinations and natural ingredients to create well-balanced meals with optimal benefits. Here are a few quick examples.

#### **Berries Start the Perfect Summer Day**

Girl holding watermelon - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Breakfast is the perfect opportunity to learn how to work seasonal produce into your meals because there are so many quick options that take advantage of summer's offerings. A well-designed breakfast with protein and fiber means fewer cravings later in the day and more active hours to digest nutrients effectively. A simple way to add a taste of summer to this breakfast is with berries.

Berries, together with almonds, make a great topping on all-natural granolas and high-fiber cereals to provide your body the tools it needs for proper digestion. While the granola/cereal supplies the whole grains needed to fuel your body, the fruit is full of antioxidants and fiber. Best of all, this meal can take on entirely new flavors by making the slightest changes, such as strawberries one week and raspberries the next. Berries that are more exotic, such as goji berries and "yumberries," are becoming a healthy trend and easier to find in natural food stores. These are also great mixed when added to your favorite breakfast foods, like whole-grain waffles.

If you're looking for even more of a change from the ordinary, try making a homemade smoothie with 1 cup of plain yogurt, 1 tbsp nut butter, a banana and ½ cup frozen berries. A smoothie made from these types of ingredients is especially refreshing and energy-boosting on hot summer days because it is full of nutrients, fiber and protein to keep you satisfied all morning long.

Between the variety of good-for-you cereals, yogurts and summer berries, breakfast can take on many personalities and flavors. And most importantly, a well-balanced breakfast starts your day right because it gives you the foundation to continue making smart food choices throughout the day.

### **Add Summer Fun to Lunch**

Lunch is one meal that often lacks variety and thought. Do you find yourself choosing the same two or three options every week? You're not alone. So many of us rush through lunch, grab something quickly and don't put enough thought into the importance of this meal. Luckily, there are plenty of easy-to-prepare options that incorporate the best of summer and can spice up your day.

Woman cooking - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark There are a few key factors to creating a lunch that incorporates the season's fresh produce. First, focus on healthy fats and omega-3s. These fats, which provide energy and have heart-health benefits, can be found in avocados, olive oil, walnuts and other nuts. There are so many ways to add these simple ingredients to salads and sandwiches. For example, avocado goes great with a turkey sandwich with a slice of fresh tomato, or as a delicious and nutritious salad topper. Speaking of salads, skip the premade dressings and opt for olive oil to bring positive nutrition to your salad. Be sure to also sprinkle a few nuts on top for added protein and crunch.

From almonds to walnuts, cashews to pine nuts, there are a variety of options that all add protein and flavor and can revolutionize your salad. One of my favorite summer salads is a simple combination of fresh greens with pine nuts, strawberries, avocado and feta cheese.

Grilled Chicken Salad Recipe - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **Nutritional Analysis Per Serving**  
Calories 250 • Total Fat 7g • Cholesterol 65mg • Protein 29g • Sodium 264mg • Carbohydrate 14g • Calcium 108mg • Potassium 698mg • Fiber 4g • Saturated Fat 1g • Monounsaturated Fat 4g If you eat out regularly for lunch and fall prey to ordering big meals, or feel limited by what restaurants have to offer, try avoiding the sandwich specials with chips and cola and opt for places that serve lighter fare, such as vegetarian fajitas or vegetable soup with green salad, and complete the meal with sparkling water. Or, if

you're a regular brown bagger, try bringing in frozen meals with colorful vegetables and a handful of omega-3-filled walnuts.

Contrary to popular belief, the right frozen entree also can be a healthy meal option. Not only will they supply you with one of your required five servings of vegetables for the day, but most frozen entrees also help control portion size. Remember to always check labels to ensure the ingredients are all-natural and provide the proper amounts of protein, complex carbohydrates, fiber and nutrients.

### **Taste the Summer Nights**

One of the best parts of summer is sitting outside with friends and enjoying a leisurely dinner while the sun goes down. Although not every night can be a party, it is still possible to make the most of dinner by creating balanced meals with vegetarian protein, whole grains and vegetables.

The best way to make any dinner festive is to experiment with seasonal vegetables. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs offer the perfect opportunity to try what's local and in season. CSAs provide a means for the public to purchase food from local farms by participating as a member in their local program. There are more than 2,200 CSA programs in the United States. For more information on a CSA near you, visit [www.localharvest.org/csa](http://www.localharvest.org/csa).

Great complements to seasonal vegetables are exotic whole grains and fish. Start with brown rice or *quinoa* (pronounced keen-wa), which are easy to prepare in a rice cooker and can be flavored with carrots, broccoli, spinach and sunflower seeds. Also try adding Tamari or Bragg; these are great soy-sauce alternatives for seasoning your vegetable dishes. Another dinner favorite is turkey sausage and fresh tomato quarters prepared on the grill and placed on a bed of mixed greens, dressed with olive oil and red wine vinegar.

### **Grilled Portobello Mushroom Burgers Recipe - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark** **Nutritional Analysis Per Serving**

Calories 283 • Total Fat 9g • Cholesterol 0mg • Protein 8g • Sodium 140mg • Carbohydrate 46g • Calcium 203mg • Potassium 134mg • Fiber 9g • Saturated Fat 1g • Monounsaturated Fat 5g If you're dining on your own and don't feel like preparing a feast, try pairing convenience foods with natural foods, such as microwaveable rice with steamed veggies and grilled chicken. Or dress up a canned soup with fresh broccoli and tofu cubes.

Most importantly, when it comes to dinner, try to make it smaller than lunch. While fresh produce and nutrient-packed foods are important to consume, it's also important to be mindful of how much you consume at each meal. Dinner is meant to complete your day, but does not need to provide the same number of calories as breakfast or lunch, when you are typically more active and have increased caloric demands.

After you learn how to prepare a dish or two, take some time to experiment in the kitchen and come up with your own favorite summer meals. It will make this wonderful season more memorable for you, your family and friends.

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