Guilt-Free Comfort Food

This simple fall meal is low in calories yet rich in the flavors of fall.

October 4, 2021 By Bob Barnett

Cool weather whets the appetite. But hearty autumn meals can also pile on calories. Pandemic-related weight gain is a real thing, and for people who are HIV positive, certain antiretrovirals and other drugs may contribute to weight gain as well.

So as we head indoors, careful about COVID-19 again, we want comfort food—without the guilt. Wouldn't it be great to rediscover the pleasures of home cooking without overindulging?

Welcome to our table. This delicious and nutritious menu comes from Fred Hutch's Cook for Your Life, a recipe website launched by Ann Ogden Gaffney, a passionate cook and three-time cancer survivor. Her aim is to make nutritious and delicious food that's simple to prepare. Every recipe is created by chefs and reviewed by a registered dietitian.

On the menu tonight: Spicy Indian-Style Chicken/Turkey Burgers, Pumpkin & Arugula Salad With Hazelnuts and Baked Apples With Rosemary & Honey. The flavors are rich and hearty, taking advantage of fall's harvest. The whole meal is less than 800 calories, including the burger bun, and it's nutritious too: low in saturated fat and sodium, moderate in sugar and high in satiating protein and fiber. Dig in.

Spicy Indian-Style Chicken/Turkey Burgers

These spicy Indian-style chicken/turkey burgers are really a healthy and delicious version of kofta, the ubiquitous Indian and Middle Eastern version of meatballs. Adding dark turkey meat gives these burgers extra depth.

If you happen to be outside grilling, shape the mixture into patties to make healthy, rich-tasting burgers, or roll it into little meatballs to broil or sauté for a party appetizer or to eat with pasta. It's all good—and all good for you.

30 minutes prep; 8 servings; 11 ingredients

Ingredients

1 large egg

3 tablespoons Greek yogurt

3 tablespoons finely chopped parsley, plus more for garnish

½ spicy red chili pepper pod (cayenne or Thai bird), or to taste

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon freshly grated ginger

1½ teaspoons salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1½ pounds ground chicken

½ pound ground turkey, preferably dark meat

1/3 cup breadcrumbs

Directions

1. Beat the egg, yogurt, parsley, red pepper, coriander, ginger, salt and pepper together in a large bowl. Add the ground chicken and turkey and mix well together. Add the breadcrumbs and mix until well combined. Shape the mixture into roughly 8 balls slightly flattened into thick patties.
2. Grill on a barbecue or a ridged iron grill pan until firm, about 5 minutes on each side, depending on the thickness of the patty. When cooked, the burgers should be firm to the touch with no bounce. Garnish with parsley.
3. Serve in toasted buns with lettuce or spinach and a side of Pumpkin & Arugula Salad With Hazelnuts.

Nutrition facts per serving*

Calories: 195; Fat: 10g; Saturated fat: 3g; Polyunsaturated fat: 2g; Monounsaturated fat: 4g; Carbohydrates: 4g;Sugar: 1g; Fiber: 1g; Protein: 23g; Sodium: 326g
*not including bun

Chef Tips

Taste test the chili pepper first to make sure you're comfortable with the heat you're adding to your burgers. Cut off a tiny piece and see just how hot it really is. A mouthful of milk will take the heat away. Make sure not to add any of the seeds or the white pith from inside the pepper—that's where most of the heat is stored. If you can't find fresh red chilies, add a ½ teaspoon of cayenne, or to taste.

To make your own bread crumbs, take any bread that's gone a little stale, dice the slices and grind them on a coarse setting in a food processor.

Courtesy of Cook for Your Life/Joe Gafney

Pumpkin & Arugula Salad With Hazelnuts

This recipe makes for a delicious addition to your fall salad rotation. Meatier squash cultivars—pumpkin, kabocha, butternut—are the best. (Nutty-tasting kabocha is my personal favorite.) This simple yet delicious salad tosses roasted pumpkin in a tangy maple vinaigrette dressing with the peppery cruciferous salad green arugula.

30 minutes prep; 4 servings; 9 ingredients

Ingredients

1½ pounds sugar pumpkin or butternut squash or kabocha squash, peeled, deseeded and cut into 1-inch cubes

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided

1/3 cup hazelnuts

salt to taste

¼ cup Pecorino or Parmesan cheese, cut with a vegetable peeler

freshly ground pepper to taste

1 tablespoon cider vinegar

2 teaspoons maple syrup, or to taste

5 cups arugula

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Spread the cubed pumpkin or squash onto a baking sheet and drizzle with 1 tablespoon olive oil and salt. Toss to coat. Bake for 30 minutes, turning occasionally, until tender and browned. Let cool slightly.
3. While the pumpkin is baking, spread the hazelnuts onto a baking sheet and toast in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes or until the skins are well browned and cracking.
4. Remove the hazelnuts and let cool Rub the skins off the hazelnuts with a kitchen towel. Discard the skins and roughly chop the nuts. Set aside.
5. Make the maple vinaigrette: In a small bowl whisk the vinegar, salt, pepper and maple syrup together. Gradually beat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil until well blended. Taste for sharpness and adjust seasonings if necessary.
6. Pour the vinaigrette over slightly cooled pumpkin, arugula, pecorino and toasted hazelnuts. Toss when ready to serve.

Nutrition facts per serving

Calories: 287; Fat: 23g; Saturated fat: 4g; Polyunsaturated fat: 3g; Monounsaturated fat: 16g; Carbohydrates: 17g; Sugar: 8g; Fiber: 3g; Protein: 8g; Sodium: 551mg

Baked Apples With Rosemary & Honey

These baked apples are a quick way to make a healthy dessert, hot or cold. All you need are some tart/sweet apples, like Braeburns or Pink Ladies, and an oven. Try to buy small apples and allow one per person.

20 minutes prep; 8 servings; 6 ingredients

Ingredients

2-3 tablespoons almond slices or chopped walnuts

2 teaspoons melted butter

1 teaspoon finely chopped rosemary leaves

4 tart/sweet apples, peeled and cut in half, cores scooped out

½ cup honey, or to taste

1 tablespoon water

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.

2. Dry roast the sliced almonds or walnuts in a heavy pan until they just begin to color. Set aside in a bowl
3. Generously smear a baking dish or cookie sheet with butter and sprinkle with rosemary. Take the apples and roll them around on the pan to coat with a little bit of the butter and herbs.
4. Place them cut side down in the dish or sheet. Drizzle them with the honey and add the water to the bottom of the dish.
5. Bake in the center of the oven for about 30 to 40 minutes. About halfway through, carefully flip the apples over and baste them with the pan juic Continue to bake until the apples are soft and a bit caramelized on top. Let them cool for at least 10 minutes before serving.
6. Serve sprinkled with the toasted almonds; if desired, top with thick yogurt or ice cream.

Nutrition facts per serving*

Calories: 135; Fat: 3g; Saturated fat: 1g; Poly-unsaturated fat: 1g; Monounsaturated fat: 1g; Carbohydrates: 30g; Sugar: 27g; Fiber: 2g; Protein: 1g; Sodium: 2mg

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