

SOURCE: Charleston (SC) Post & Courier

AUDIENCE: 349,446 [provided by Nielsen//NetRatings]

DATE: 12-23-2011

HEADLINE: How to battle winter bulge – The Post and Courier, Charleston SC – News, Sports, Entertainment

Source Website

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Scripps Howard News Service

Friday, December 23, 2011

As the leaves change color and the temperatures drop, I yearn to prepare hearty meals. Chicken and dumplings, hot tamales and chili, beef stew and French toast are at the top of my list.

The sad thing is that after I've consumed one of these fabulous dishes, I'm more prone to hibernate than I am to get up and be productive.

According to Sarah Griswold, nutritionist for the Knox County (Tenn.) Health Department, our social lives change during cooler months. We become less active and in turn, that makes it more difficult to maintain our weight.

"Research shows that people gain a couple of pounds during the winter months ... but we don't lose that weight over the next year, and so the weight can add up," she said.

If you're not the type to pull out a parka and go for a bike ride, there are still ways to burn off extra calories in the comfort of your home.

"If you have stairs in your house, you have a free exercise machine. Just go up and down the stairs, whether it's to the second floor or the basement (and) there's the old standby trick, if you're watching TV, get up and move during commercial breaks," she said.

Using canned foods (8- or 16-ounce containers) as weights is another tip she offers for burning calories.

"Remain as active as possible and watch your portion sizes because this time of year is when the rich foods come out and the calories add up even faster," she said.

Lowering the fat and calorie content in recipes is especially important on holidays when families gather for dinner.

"If you are the cook, you are going to be able to tell the difference between Grandma's traditional recipe and a lower-calorie recipe, but if you don't tell anyone else and do a good job with the food prep, a lot of people aren't going to be able to notice," she said.

These cookbooks can help you get a head start on battling the wintertime bulge:

Ellie Krieger is a household name when it comes to healthy cooking. The James Beard Foundation Award-winning **author** and Food Network Star has been helping people make healthy food for years through her cooking show "Healthy Appetite."

"Comfort Food Fix"(Wiley News, \$29.99), Krieger's fourth cookbook, transforms the most hearty of dishes into healthy options.

She has revamped a traditional chicken and biscuit pot pie recipe from 640 calories to a more manageable 400 calories and converted a recipe for double chocolate bread pudding from 470 to 240 calories per serving.

And Robin Miller, a nutritionist, food *writer*, cookbook *author* and host of Food Network's "Quick Fix Meals" has compiled *the cookbook "Robin Takes 5"* (*Andrews McMeel Publishing*, \$29.99) in which recipes use only five ingredients with each dish containing 500 calories or less.

Green Bean Casserole With Crispy Shallots

Yields 8 servings

Ingredients

1/4 cup olive oil

6 medium shallots, sliced into rings (about 1 cup)

1 1/2 pounds thin fresh string beans or haricots verts, trimmed

1 pound button mushrooms, sliced

6 large cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

3 cups cold low-fat 1 percent milk

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley leaves

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

3/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Nonstick cooking spray

Directions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil in skillet over medium-high heat until very hot. Add 1/4 cup shallots and cook, stirring until golden brown and crisp, about 2 minutes. Transfer to paper towel to drain. Repeat with remaining shallots, cooking 1/4 cup at a time. Reserve oil in skillet. Steam green beans in steamer basket over pot of boiling water for about 3 minutes, until bright green and still crisp. Heat 1 tablespoon reserved shallot oil in deep skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally until mushroom liquid is evaporated and they begin to brown, about 12 minutes. Add garlic and thyme and cook, stirring for 1 minute. Transfer mushroom mixture to bowl. Whisk together milk and flour until flour is dissolved. Add mixture to skillet and, whisking constantly, bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium low, whisking occasionally until thickened, about 10 minutes. Remove pan from heat and stir in green beans, mushroom mixture, cup of cheese, parsley, nutmeg, salt and black pepper.

6 Coat a 2–quart baking dish with cooking spray. Spoon green bean mixture into prepared dish and sprinkle top with crispy shallots and remaining 2 tablespoons cheese. Bake until golden on top and bubbling, about 20 minutes.

Approximate values per 1 cup serving:150 calories, 6g total fat, 2g saturated fat, 9g protein, 18g carbohydrates, 3g fiber, 18mg cholesterol, 330mg sodium.

Source:"Comfort Food Fix" (Wiley, \$29.99)

Caramelized Onion Soup With Melted Swiss Croutons

Yields 4 servings

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive oil

4 cups thinly sliced yellow onions

1 teaspoon dried thyme

6 cups reduced–sodium beef broth

Salt and pepper to taste

4 slices sourdough bread, about 1–inch thick

4 (1 ounce) slices Swiss cheese

Directions

Heat oil in large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and saute 8–10 minutes, until golden brown and tender. Add thyme and cook until fragrant, approximately 1 minute. Add broth and bring to simmer. Simmer 10 minutes and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Toast bread slices in toaster or under broiler. Place bread in bottom of soup bowls and top with Swiss cheese. Ladle onion soup over top and serve.

Approximate values per serving:274 calories, 11g fat, 4g saturated fat, 13mg cholesterol, 28g carbohydrates, 15g protein, 3g fiber, 340mg sodium.

Source:"*Robin Takes 5*" (*Andrews McMeel Publishing*, \$29.99)

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Highlights: author, writer, the cookbook, Robin Takes 5, Andrews McMeel Publishing