

Keep your weight from rising as temperatures fall

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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 the 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 or hit a hiking trail on a brisk and breezy day, 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," Griswold said.

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

GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE WITH CRISPY SHALLOTS

Yields 8 servings
 ¼ cup olive oil
 6 medium shallots, sliced into rings (about 1 cup)
 1½ 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
 ½ cup finely chopped fresh parsley leaves
 ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 ¾ teaspoon salt
 ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Nonstick cooking spray

1. 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 ¼ cup at a time. Reserve oil in skillet.

2. Steam green beans in steamer basket over pot of boiling water for about 3 minutes, until bright green and still crisp.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Remove pan from heat and stir in green beans, mushroom mixture, cup cheese, parsley, nutmeg, salt and black pepper.

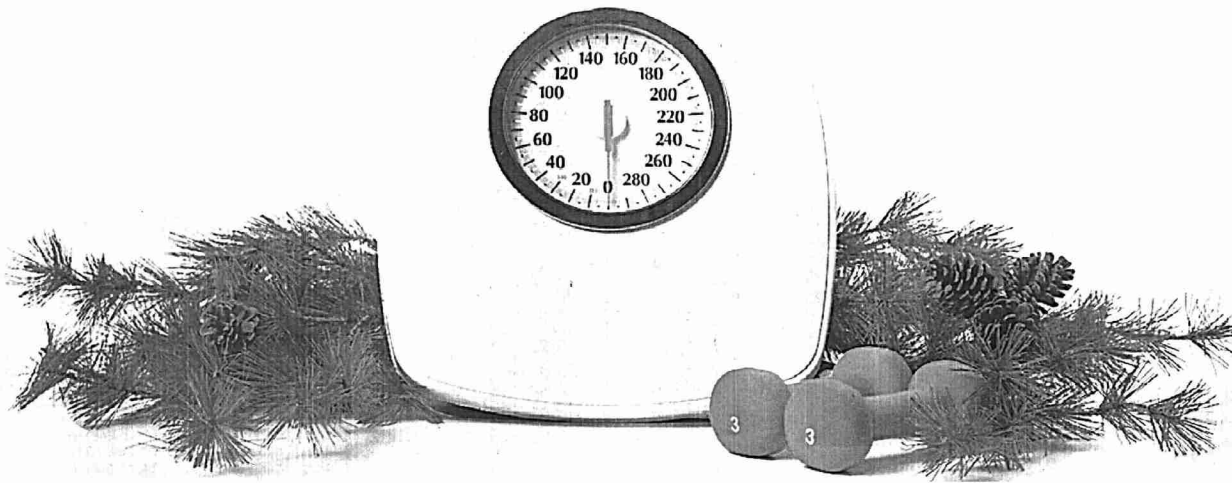
6. Coat a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Spoon green bean mixture into prepared dish and sprinkle top with crispy shallots and remaining 2 tablespoons cheese. Bake until golden on top and bubbling, about 20 minutes.

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

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

■ Robin Miller, a nutritionist, food writer, cookbook author and host of Food Network's "Quick Fix Meals" (Andrews McMeel Publishing, \$29.99) has compiled the cookbook "Robin Takes 5" (was released-Nov. 1) in which recipes use only five ingredients with each dish containing 500 calories or less.





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