

Skinny Outdoor Entertaining

By Dorothy Foltz-Gray

Dine alfresco the healthy way with these tasty low-calorie ideas.

Halt the Salt

That grilled corn slathered with butter and salt? That teriyaki-marinated chicken breast? Those delicious and classic cookout foods (among others!) may be sending you over the recommended limits for sodium intake. Most of us should be getting no more than a teaspoon a day. And children, African-Americans, and people over 50 should slash salt to about half a teaspoon, the latest USDA dietary guidelines say. The truth: Many of us cram in about a teaspoon and a half. But don't worry, you can cut back on salt without losing flavor at your next cookout or picnic, says Connie Guttersen, R.D., Ph.D., registered dietitian and nutrition instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in Napa Valley and author of *The New Sonoma Diet*. Her favorite trick? "Use herbs and spices—basil, dill, cumin, and cayenne—to add flavor to outdoor dishes without adding calories."

Lighten Up Salads

Instead of heavy mayonnaise potato and pasta salads and coleslaw, try new combinations like greens mixed with mango and papaya and healthy proteins like cashews, says Mallika Sukjaro, owner of Dee Daa, a new Thai restaurant in New York City. Dietitian Kate Scarlata, R.D., mother of three in Medway, Massachusetts, tosses eight cups of raw veggies into four cups of pasta to lighten her family's pasta salads. "And I opt for just one-third cup of an olive-oil based dressing. The salad is colorful and has far fewer calories, since raw veggies run about 25 calories per cup rather than 160 calories for pasta."

Grill Veggies, Not Steak

Honking slabs of meat aren't the only fare to throw on the grill. Corn, sliced eggplant, zucchini—almost all vegetables—taste terrific grilled, says chef Anne Connally, founder of Canyon Foods, a small specialty food manufacturer in Dallas: "Serve with a salsa or dressing on the side."

Fool Your Kebabs

No need to skewer only beef and pork, says Scarlata: "Alternating vegetables with meat—try hunks of chicken sausage—helps keep meat portions reasonable. Plus, it takes longer to take apart a kebab, and slower eating leads to less gluttony." Or make fruit kebobs, suggests Sara Vance, a children's fitness instructor in South Carlsbad, California. "Cut the fruit into fun shapes using fondant [a type of icing] cutters. You'll be surprised at how many people pick these over brownies." You can find fondant cutters in kitchen supply stores or online.

Eat Lean or Mean

Just because you have a grill doesn't mean you have to make like Memphis with the pork ribs, says Gutteresen: "Stick to the leanest cuts of meat"—chicken, fish, or any meat that has fewer than two grams of fat per serving. "Those are lower in saturated fat, the kind that raises LDL (bad) cholesterol levels."

Dump Dressings for Avocado

"Instead of cheese and mayo, swap for avocado," says dietitian Kate Geagan, M.S., R.D., author of *Go Green, Get Lean* and mother of two in Park City, Utah: "Avocados have a rich, creamy taste so you feel incredibly satisfied. You save calories too: One tablespoon of mayo packs 100 calories, one-fifth an avocado just 50 cal." They're also plump with healthful unsaturated fat and close to 20 vitamins and minerals like potassium, vitamin E, and folic acid.

Make Your Own Popsicles

"Get the kids in the kitchen to help get ready for the BBQ," says Vance. "Pour pureed fruit and juice or a smoothie into popsicle molds. Allow four hours to freeze."

Skip the Chips

Instead of potato or tortilla chips, put colorful crunchy raw veggies on the picnic table, suggests Mary Hartley, R.D., M.P.H., a nutritionist for CalorieCount.com. "Dunk in creamy fat-free blue cheese dressing." Or serve fresh cut-up fruit to dip in fat-free yogurt. Another option: lightly salted pistachios, which have fewer calories than other nuts, says Keri Glassman, M.S., R.D., co-author of *The 02 Diet*: "Cracking these open slows down your eating, and the pile of shells reminds you how many you've had."

CalorieCount.com

Eat Real Food

"The more processed a food is, the worse it is for you," says chef-turned-weight expert Timothy S. Harlan, M.D., medical director at Tulane University School of Medicine, creator of DrGourmet.com, and author of *Just Tell Me What to Eat*. "Make your hamburgers with fresh ground beef, not premade patties. Skip processed meats like hot dogs, bacon, and deli meats."

DrGourmet.com

Pick Fresh over Sweet

Sure, we all get parched in the summer. But instead of reaching for the Big Gulp, get seasonal, says Gutteresen: "Mix one part 100 percent fruit juice with three parts tap or sparkling water. Add a slice of lime or a sprig of mint, lemon verbena, or even basil, and you have a refreshing and quenching spritzer."

Pick the Other Potato

Instead of potato chips, french fries, or potato salad, bake sweet potatoes as fries, suggests Janet Brill, Ph.D., R.D., author of *Prevent a Second Heart Attack*. Each half-cup serving has 3.5 grams of fiber and is loaded with vitamin A and heart-healthy potassium.

Count Beans

Instead of baked beans swimming in molasses and brown sugar, toss beans with a little olive oil, herbs, tomatoes, onions, and red peppers. "Beans are a lean-and-mean protein," says Brill. "They have a whopping 13 grams of fiber per cup, antioxidants, and tons of vitamins and minerals." And they don't dent your pocketbook either.

Don't Skip Dessert

Instead, grill pineapple, says chef Leanne Ely, author of *Saving Dinner* and creator of savingdinner.com. "You won't miss the cheesecake." Share the grill with bananas, peaches, apples, and pears.

Savingdinner.com

Overhaul Mom's Chicken Salad

No one's knocking grandma but let's hit the pause button on excess mayonnaise. Instead, toss chopped chicken breast with halved cherry tomatoes, blanched green beans, red bell pepper, herbs, and a light vinaigrette, suggests Stephanie Leach, an owner of website Families Eating Better and mother of one in Longmont, Colorado.

Families Eating Better

Cheat on Meat

"Serve burgers made with whole-wheat bread crumbs and pureed beans to cut the fat," says Yvonne Quiones Syto, M.A., R.D., author of *Nutrition Map*. And while you're at it, serve them on whole-grain buns.

Pop Corn

"Snacks are the sneak thieves in picnics and camping," says recipe developer Janet Groene, author of *Cooking Aboard Your RV*. "They are loaded with salt, fat, and sugar. Instead, invest in a campfire corn popper, then be sparing with salt and oil." You can use it around the fire pit or on the grill at home too.

Serve Small

No matter what healthy deliciousness you've cooked up, serving it in smaller portions is going to help the final calorie count. One way to do that, and spiff up your presentation, is to set the patio table with smaller plates. Use your dessert or salad plates or buy a few small plastic plates in the season's fun designs. If the food is full of flavor and the presentation is pretty, you won't even miss the extra calories.