

Summertime and the eating is easy

You can enjoy all the cookouts and picnics the season brings, without the guilt of gaining weight.

By Koren Wetmore

Summertime's here and with it comes picnics and barbecues filled with high-fat, calorie-charged foods such as hamburgers and potato salad. But don't cancel your social invitations just yet. The season also brings a bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables that, combined with mindful eating, offer delicious outdoor dining alternatives that boost your nutrition, not your waistline.

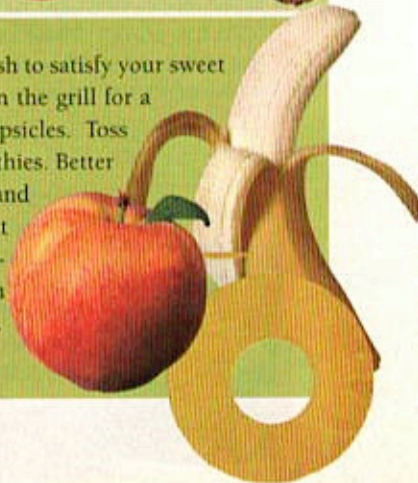
"Meals are a social event, they're not supposed to be a punishment," says licensed nutritionist Ann Yelmokas McDermott, Ph.D., a research scientist with the USDA Nutrition Research Center at Tufts University in Boston. "You should be able to have a huge amount of food, if you plan for success."

The following tips will help you enjoy summertime dieting at its best:

1 Grill those veggies. Portobello mushrooms, bell peppers, tomatoes, zucchini and onions can be cooked in large pieces on the grill. Brush them with olive oil, teriyaki sauce or marinade for flavor. Baby carrots will grill quicker when placed in a foil packet. "Just slice them up, sprinkle seasoning and drizzle a bit of olive oil on them so they don't dry out," says registered dietitian Marjorie Geiser, owner of MEG Fitness in Running Springs, Calif. "It's colorful and nutritious."



2 Bring on the fruit. Grill it, freeze it or serve it fresh to satisfy your sweet tooth. Place pineapple, peach chunks or banana on the grill for a tasty treat. Freeze fruit juice to make nutritious popsicles. Toss berries or some melon into the blender and make smoothies. Better yet, do some prep work so you'll have fruit snacks on hand to quell your fast-food munchies. "Buy a bunch of fruit and make a fruit salad or wash and slice some strawberries and put them in the refrigerator. That way when you're hungry, it's right there, ready to eat," Geiser says.



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3 Substitute soy. Use soy-based mayonnaise in potato and macaroni salads and in coleslaw to cut down on fat. Soy versions of burgers and hot dogs provide a flavorful, low-fat alternative to the traditional beef- and pork-based choices. You can make your own from a recipe or look for ready-made versions at the market. "Your grocer will probably include them on the shelves in the canned section or in the frozen food section," says Georgia Hodgkin, R.D., professor of nutrition and dietetics at Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, Calif. Remember to read labels, she says, as the amount of fat differs, depending on the brand or recipe you use.



4 Switch meats. If you prefer a more traditional hot dog or burger, opt for a chicken or turkey variety. Look for products made from white meat, as dark meat varieties will contain more fat, says McDermott.



5 Sip spritzers. Swap sugary soda or alcoholic beverages for spritzers, drinks made with juice or wine diluted with carbonated water. Alcohol not only dehydrates you but it also lowers your inhibitions and causes you to eat more than you normally would, McDermott says. "Choose a wine spritzer over other alcoholic beverages. Or if you want a non-alcoholic drink, have carbonated water mixed with orange juice for an orange spritzer," she says. "That way you stay hydrated with water, and you reduce the amount of calories."



6 Downsize it. Just because your host made quarter-pound burgers or grilled huge chicken breasts doesn't mean you have to actually accept that portion size. Ask for a smaller burger or cut the chicken breast in half. The same goes for brownies and other desserts. Your actions may even help a fellow dieter. "When someone starts cutting the brownies into smaller pieces, it's amazing how many people will then follow and select smaller sizes," McDermott says.



7 Eat before you go. Don't be fooled into thinking you can "save" your calories for a big meal by skipping an earlier one, Geiser warns. All you'll do is arrive at the picnic or barbecue feeling starved and deprived. You may even want to eat a small snack before attending a social event to help lower your appetite.



8 Plan by colors and quarters. Divide your plate into quarters and select foods based on color. Colorful fruits and veggies — the yellows, the reds, the burgundies and the deep greens — contain powerful micronutrients and less calories than "white" choices such as potatoes or macaroni noodles. Your color choices should fill two to three of your quarters, and meat and/or white choices should fill no more than one-quarter of your plate. If you see a dessert you want, cut back on meat, not veggies. ■

