

Food Power: Healthy Eating for African Americans

Traditional recipes passed down from one generation to the next, family favorites that recall the wonderful aromas and tastes of Sunday dinners, ever popular mainstream foods and “hot” new flavors! Whatever dishes come to the family table, food is important to us, as part of our heritage. In so many ways, food nurtures both body and soul. By making smart eating and lifestyle choices, you may be able to promote health and reduce health risks.

Good Health: The Nutrition Link!

What we eat may affect our risk for certain diseases. Obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, cancer and kidney disease are serious health problems that may be linked to diet. For all these health problems, risks for African Americans are higher than for many other groups in the US. Why? Genetics, life’s stresses, environmental factors and everyday food and lifestyle choices contribute to risk. Nutritionally speaking, many of us eat too much fat and sodium (mostly from salt), not enough fiber, calcium or potassium, and perhaps more calories than are needed. How about you?

Another concern, about 75% of African Americans have some difficulty digesting lactose, the sugar in milk. Yet avoiding milk just adds to a calcium shortfall. Milk’s many nutrients, including calcium, may help reduce chances of high blood pressure and osteoporosis. Recent evidence also suggests adequate intake of dairy foods (such as milk, yogurt or cheese) may be associated with lower body weights.

Healthful Eating: The Choice is Yours

How can you turn your healthful eating challenges and your cooking style into opportunities, and serve great-tasting, health-promoting foods that you and your family deserve?

◆ **Build on the positives!** Enjoy traditional African-American foods. Many are nutrient rich, yet low in fat and cholesterol.



Southern Style Chicken & Rice Dinner

- ◆ For their vitamins, fiber and other healthful components, eat deep-green and yellow vegetables, such as collard and turnip greens, sweet potatoes, okra and winter squash. Dark-green leafy vegetables, such as collard greens or kale, contribute calcium, too. Table 1 suggests ways to flavor veggies without overdoing it on fat, salt or added sugars.
- ◆ Make cornbread with whole cornmeal, for the whole-grain benefits, and with olive oil for its heart-smart monounsaturated fats.
- ◆ Like homemade dressing with poultry? You can still enjoy the great flavor, but skip the giblets (liver, heart and gizzard), which tend to be high in cholesterol. Make dressing with whole-grain bread or cornbread. Try a different twist: fish stuffed with dressing.
- ◆ Eat beans and other legumes such as black-eyed peas, split peas and lentils often: with rice, in soup, chili and stew or in pasta dishes. Low in fat and high in protein, beans supply fiber and other nutrients and are economical, too.
- ◆ Choose lean ground meat and lean cuts of meat when selecting beef, lamb or pork (those with “loin” or “round” in the name are good choices). Also keep portions sensible: a three- to four-ounce portion per person (the size of a deck of cards) is about right.
- ◆ Opt for some whole grains, which provide vitamins, minerals and fiber, and may help reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes. Eat whole-grain cereal or mix it “50-50” with your favorite breakfast cereal; swap whole-wheat bread for white bread on sandwiches or try brown rice in place of white rice.
- ◆ **Update your cooking style.** Some traditional African-American dishes may be high in fat, salt and sugar. Rather than give up these foods, make tasty, better-for-you versions with small changes.

Table 1: Steps to Better-For-You Food Prep

<i>If you . . .</i>	<i>Try this . . .</i>
	For less fat:
Flavor vegetables, beans and rice with bacon, bacon drippings, fatback, ham hocks or salt pork.	Use lean ham, turkey ham, smoked turkey wings, turkey bacon or Canadian bacon; go easy since these meats tend to be high in sodium. Or season vegetables with onion, celery or garlic.
Deep-fry chicken.	Broil, bake, barbecue, oven-fry or roast chicken. Take off the skin before you eat it. Or remove skin from raw chicken, roll pieces in crushed cereal or other grain-based coating, then bake for crunch and flavor.
Serve chicken, dumplings, potatoes and other foods with gravy.	Use low-sodium bouillon instead of drippings to make gravy; skim the fat if you do use drippings. Go easy on gravy, too.
Prepare creamy soups and stews.	Thicken them with mashed vegetables, evaporated skim milk or plain nonfat yogurt.
	For less salt and sodium:
Season many foods with salt. (Salt may contribute to high blood pressure.)	Experiment with celery, onions, garlic, pepper, curry, paprika, other herbs and spices, citrus juice and vinegar.
Make gravy and soups with regular bouillon or canned broth.	Use low-sodium canned broth.
	For more calcium:
Skip milk, perhaps because you have difficulty digesting lactose (the sugar in milk).	Drink “lactose-reduced” milk or smaller amounts of milk with a meal, as that’s easier to digest. Try calcium-fortified juice or soy beverages. Get calcium from low-fat or fat-free yogurt, or from reduced-fat hard cheeses (e.g., Cheddar or Colby), which don’t have much lactose. Remember, certain green vegetables such as collard greens, spinach and kale contribute some calcium, too.
	For less added sugar:
Sprinkle sugar on fruit.	Choose ripe fruit and enhance the natural sweetness with cinnamon or nutmeg.
Cook sweet potatoes and other vegetables with sugar.	Enjoy cooked sweet potatoes plain, or sprinkle with cinnamon, nutmeg or allspice.
Enjoy sugary desserts, such as cobblers and sweet potato pie.	Experiment with using less sugar in cobblers and pies; just be sure to use very ripe fruits.
	To keep nutrients in:
Cook your veggies for a long time until they have a very soft texture.	Shorten the cooking time so veggies are just tender crisp. Use less water to retain vitamins or try steaming, stir-frying and microwaving veggies.

- ❖ **Take stock of all your food choices, including** convenience items and prepared takeout foods where fat, sodium, added sugar and calories can add up.
 - Read food labels when you shop and pay special attention to the number of calories, as well as the amount of fat (especially saturated fat) and sodium in a serving.
 - Watch your portions at home and when you eat away from home, too.
 - Look for ways to fit more fruits, vegetables and cooked dried beans or peas into dishes you enjoy.

More Steps to Health

For more ways to lower your health risks...

- ❖ **Move more, sit less.** Take a walk, gradually increasing your pace and distance. When driving, park the car away from your destination to fit in more steps. Be active with your kids; try in-line skating, basketball or bicycling. If you don't drive, get off the bus or train one or more stops earlier; walk the rest of the way. Volunteer in your community, perhaps in a hospital, local garden or in an after school program for kids.
- ❖ **Get regular medical check-ups.** Finding a health problem early and getting proper medical care can lower your risks for many serious complications.

Resolve today to take steps toward good health: the choices are yours!

These delicious healthy living recipes use some of our tips for making quick, easy-to-prepare meals.

Southern Style Chicken & Rice Dinner

Prep: 5 minutes **Cook:** 30 minutes

- 1 slice OSCAR MAYER Lower Sodium Bacon
- 4 bone-in chicken thighs (about 1-1/2 lbs.), skin and excess fat removed
- Black pepper and garlic powder
- 1 small red pepper, cut into strips
- 1 can (14 oz.) reduced sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup water
- 1 pkg. (10 oz.) frozen collard greens, thawed, squeezed dry
- 2 cups MINUTE Brown Rice, uncooked

COOK bacon in large nonstick skillet until crisp. Drain bacon, reserving drippings in skillet. Crumble bacon; set aside.

ADD chicken to skillet. Season well with pepper and garlic powder; cover. Cook 8 to 10 min. on each side or until chicken is cooked through. Remove chicken from skillet; set aside.

ADD red peppers to skillet; cook and stir 2 min. Add broth, water and greens; stir. Bring to boil. Stir in rice. Top with chicken; cover. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook 5 min. Remove from heat. Let stand 5 to 7 min. or until liquid is absorbed. Stir. Sprinkle with crumbled bacon.

Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition Bonus: Delight your taste buds with this flavorful low-calorie, low-fat meal. The collard greens are an excellent source of both vitamins A and C.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 350 calories, 10g total fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 70mg cholesterol, 340mg sodium, 40g carbohydrate, 5g dietary fiber, 0g sugars, 26g protein, 140%DV vitamin A, 80%DV vitamin C, 15%DV calcium, 15%DV iron.

Exchange: 2-1/2 Starch, 1 Vegetable, 2 Meat (L)

Sweet & Tangy Pork and Rice

Prep: 10 minutes **Cook:** 15 minutes

- 1 pork tenderloin (1 lb.), cut into chunks
- 1 Tbsp. oil
- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 can (20 oz.) pineapple chunks, drained
- 1 can (20 oz.) water
- 2 cups MINUTE White Rice, uncooked
- 1 large green pepper, chopped
- 1/4 cup BULL'S-EYE Original Barbecue Sauce
- 1 tsp. ground ginger

COOK and stir pork in hot oil in large skillet on medium heat 5 min. or until evenly browned. Add carrots and onions; cook and stir until pork is cooked through.

ADD remaining ingredients; mix well.

BRING to boil; cover. Remove from heat; let stand 5 min. Fluff with fork.

Makes 6 servings, 1-1/2 cups each.

Nutrition Bonus: This low-calorie, low-fat meal is a quick and easy alternative to takeout. The carrots provide vitamin A and the pineapple and green pepper team up to provide vitamin C.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 290 calories, 5g total fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 45mg cholesterol, 160mg sodium, 42g carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber, 14g sugars, 19g protein, 45%DV vitamin A, 40%DV vitamin C, 4%DV calcium, 15%DV iron.

Exchange: 2-1/2 Starch, 1 Vegetable, 1 Meat (VL), 1/2 Fat

Dietary Exchanges based on *Exchange Lists for Meal Planning* © 2003 by the American Diabetes Association and the American Dietetic Association