



Nutrition News

Starting 2021 With Nutritional Creativity

Adapting to the necessities of the COVID-19 pandemic has given many people newfound free time in expressing their creativity in the kitchen. If you'd like to start the new year with some creativity of your own, read on.

Bread baking really took off in 2020, and got so popular that grocery stores nationwide noted shortages of flour and many other baking ingredients. The shortages weren't caused by anybody hoarding flour the way toilet paper and cleaners were hoarded; home bakers were suddenly using much more flour than ever before.

Baked-In Benefits

Baking has more beneficial outcomes than just a delicious treat; one interview found that people who took part in baking classes had higher self-esteem, primarily because of increased concentration, coordination, and confidence.

Because cooking and baking have now become popular trends, people are spending more time in the kitchen, which has its own set of benefits. In a 2014 study, researchers found a positive association between the time spent on food preparation and diet quality, including a higher consumption of fruits and vegetables. In this way, spending time on cooking at home may lead to a healthier lifestyle.

Make Each Shopping Trip Count

The nature of this pandemic requires us to stay inside the house and limit contact with people whenever possible. When it's absolutely necessary to go out to get groceries, shopping

must be strategic. A daily stop at the grocery store "for just a few things" may be convenient, but it's not ideal when it comes to physical safety. Your shopping strategy should be to take care of as much as you need in the fewest possible trips.

In 2021, try experimenting with different cooking techniques. Before you do so, always remember to thaw meat in the refrigerator on a bottom shelf for about four to six hours per pound if it is frozen. Instead of roasting a chicken, consider using the "spatchcocking" technique. Spatchcocking is when you remove the backbone of the bird so that it lays flat on a baking sheet. This method cooks the bird more evenly and quickly.

Cooking Familiar Food In New Ways

Turkey, ham, and other meats can be cooked in a multi-pressure cooker or a slow cooker. Or try making a turkey roulade: pound raw, lean, tender turkey breast into a thin layer, put a layer of stuffing, and roll it tightly. Secure it with butcher's twine, and cook until the internal temperature of the turkey and stuffing reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit. For a gravy, add wings or giblets to a roasting pan to get enough drippings. Lastly, serve your roulade in slices to show a turkey-stuffing swirl!

Although what we wanted to do most during the recently-passed holiday season was be with our family, we must continue to keep in mind that travelling can spread COVID-19; and although vaccines are now available, the pandemic still has many months to go before winding down. In the meantime, schedule times for phone or video calls, or online gatherings, and enjoy meals around a virtual table.

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If possible, try planning an outdoor holiday dinner for the warmer spring months, with a safe distance of at least six feet between guests, and wearing masks when not eating or drinking.

When Stopping In Over The Winter

Always be mindful of food storage, even during this coldest part of the winter. "Just leave it in the car" might not be the best option. Even on a bitterly cold winter day, sunshine can still heat a car's interior to levels not conducive to safe food storage. On the other hand, the interior of a car will be every bit as cold as the outdoors during a sub-zero winter's night. Many liquids that include water will expand when frozen, and can easily pop open or break a can or bottle.

Hot Vs. Cold Storage

To avoid bacteria growth, hot food must be at an internal temperature of at least 140 degrees Fahrenheit. If that is not a viable option, you can divide the food into shallow containers to cool to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and then transport the foods in a cooler with ice packs to maintain their temperature. Poultry wings and legs can be kept whole, but breast and thigh meat, ham and other large foods should be sliced into smaller pieces for faster cooling.

Is Mailing An Option?

If you haven't been traveling to visit family and friends, and have been shipping items instead, keep in mind that it's possible to send some types of shelf-stable food through the mail - but allow extra time for your item to arrive at its destination. There have been massive U.S. Postal Service backlogs recently, due to a combination of an all-time high in the number of packages shipped, and thousands of postal employees unavailable to work because of illness and pandemic restrictions. The Postal Service has extensive regulations on what can and can't be mailed.

Timing Is Everything

Try to order fresh retail food products at the beginning of the week, so they are not left in transit over a weekend. Also, select a quick delivery method for perishable foods, and indicate to keep the package refrigerated. Be sure items are packaged properly according to food safety standards to ensure they remain at an appropriate temperature. Keep in mind that dry ice, waterproof packaging, and other measures to ensure this may be needed.

What Food *Can't* Be Shipped?

Perishable items are illegal to ship to a foreign country. But there are food options and ways of packing other food that will allow you to ship them overseas. For instance, items that have a shelf life of at least six months can ship - IF they are in their store-bought, sealed packaging. The food can't be something that needs refrigeration if you're going to be sending it through normal, non-commercial mail. Contact your post office or shipper to find out more.

If You're On The Receiving End

Improvements in technology and packaging have made it possible to order specialty food from virtually any market in the world - but it can be pricey, so it behooves you to take the right steps once the food arrives at your door. Reheat the food in appropriate containers. If using a microwave, transfer any food in metal containers into glass or microwave-safe containers. If you want a crisp texture on foods such as rolls and roasted vegetables, reheat them in an air fryer or oven.

We hope these tips and tricks will help you throughout this winter, and add some sense of security during these uncertain times.



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