

From the Food Bank Kitchen

Doing Dinner

It is recommended to eat a balanced breakfast and lunch and occasional snacks during the day to keep blood sugar levels steady. But for many people, dinner is their “main” meal and the time at which they eat most of their calories. In our fast-paced lifestyles, often at the end of the day fatigue, stress and time constraints tempt us to pick up takeout such as pizza, Chinese food, subs or hotdogs, to swing by the drive-through window at KFC or BK on our way home, or open a Ramen noodles packet or frozen convenience entrée to heat up in the microwave. By planning ahead when you food shop, you can prepare many balanced, healthy dinners in less than 30 minutes, with less sodium, calories, fat, and chemical additives than processed foods. Usually you will also be spending less money to feed yourself and your family a healthy home-prepared meal. Try not to have the TV on during dinner and use the opportunity to converse with family or friends, or listen to relaxing music. Finish your meal with fresh or canned fruit instead of cookies or sweets when you can.

What should dinner include?

A balanced dinner ideally includes a good source of protein, at least 1 cup of cooked or raw vegetables and/or salad (about 1/2 of your plate), and a carbohydrate source like potato, sweet potato, winter squash, peas or corn, or whole grain such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta or tortilla, wild rice or quinoa. For more information about fixing a healthy plate, check out the 10 tips Nutrition Education series at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov. Sometimes vegetables, protein and carbs can be combined in one recipe item, such as beef or chicken stew with veggies and potatoes, or vegetable lasagna.

Which foods contain protein, and which ones are better to choose?

Protein foods include both animal (meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and dairy such as cheese and yogurt) and plant sources like beans, split peas, chickpeas, nuts, seeds, and soy products (such as tofu, tempeh, and veggie burgers). Try to vary your protein food choices throughout the week. Choose seafood twice a week if you like it, and buy lean or low-fat cuts of meat. Trim or drain fat from meat and remove poultry skin. Eat plant protein foods as your protein source twice or more each week. One egg a day, on average, does not increase risk for heart disease, and only the yolk contains cholesterol and saturated fat. For portion size, most people require only 3-4 ounces of beef, pork, poultry or fish (the size of the palm of the average hand). Minimize breading and frying meats; best to roast, bake, broil, lightly sauté, or grill. Watch out for the high sodium content in processed meats like sausage, ham, hot dogs, bacon, kielbasa, pastrami, salami, and bologna.

Veggies — If eating salad with a meal, eat the salad first. Beware of high fat dressings; try to stick to a 2T serving with under 75 calories. Including low calorie veggies at each meal fills you up with high fiber, so you can feel full after the meal while taking in fewer calories from carbohydrates in starches and from fats found in most protein foods.

South of the Border Chicken Stew

This zesty dish is a whole meal in one pot!

- 4 boneless chicken breast halves, 4 oz each, cut into 1 in. chunks, seasoned w/ salt & pepper
 - 3 cups baby spinach, rinsed
 - 1 1/2 cups chopped onions
 - 1 cup chopped green bell peppers
 - 1 cup diced celery
 - 1tsp chopped garlic
 - 2 tsp dried oregano
 - 4 cups low or reduced-sodium chicken broth
 - 1 1/2 cups corn (thawed frozen or canned)
 - 1 1/2 cups canned diced tomatoes with liquid
 - 1/4 tsp hot-pepper sauce
 - 1/2 cup fat-free plain yogurt
 - 1/4 cup chopped scallions
- Yield: 4 servings of 2 1/2 cups each. Calories 325, Carbohydrate 24 gm, Fat 11 gm, Protein 34 gm, Fiber 6 gm

Directions: Heat 1 T extra-virgin olive oil in a 4-5 quart pot over medium-high. Lightly brown the chicken, stirring, about 5 minutes. Remove the chicken to a bowl. Reduce heat to medium and add 1 T olive oil, onions, bell peppers, celery, and garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, 5 minutes. Stir in the oregano, broth, and 1/2 tsp salt. Bring to a simmer and cook 10 minutes. Stir in the corn, tomatoes, and chicken and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the spinach and hot-pepper sauce. Divide the stew among 4 bowls, and serve with the yogurt and scallions in small bowls on the side.

Recipe from The Volumetrics Eating Plan, Barbara Rolls, Ph.D.2007