

From the Food Bank Kitchen

Healthy Picnic Tips

As the weather warms up, many people like to pack a cooler and head to a park or nature spot and gather with friends or family. Many traditional picnic foods like fried chicken, mayonnaise-based salads, burgers, ribs, hot dogs, and rich desserts can add a lot of calories, fat, and sodium to our diet. Those tortilla or potato chips, sodas, juice drinks, and alcoholic beverages also pack a load of unwanted calories. To balance out some of those less healthy choices, here are some ideas on how to supplement your menu and fill up with more fiber and less fat, along with a recipe for an easy mayo-free **Tuna Pasta Salad** and a **Fudge Brownie** dessert recipe with a surprising ingredient.

What to pack— Water, fresh fruit ('nature's candy'), high-fiber snacks like dried fruit, nuts and whole-grains, and foods that don't spoil as quickly as "main" dishes — such as bagels with cheese or peanut butter, veggie wraps, and vinegar-based salads. Yogurt tubes can be frozen for a healthy snack. Choose lean protein items for the grill. Don't forget sunscreen!

Add colors to your meal and fill up with fiber— Ever notice how the most common picnic side dishes are the same yellow or white color, such as coleslaw, potato or pasta salad, or corn? Summer picnics occur at the height of the fresh fruit and vegetable season. The more color in your meal, the healthier. Make a salad with foods like spinach, cucumbers, carrots, red peppers, beets, broccoli, oranges, berries, asparagus, red onion, zucchini, and peas. These will lighten up any dish. Many vegetable salads prepared ahead of time will taste even better the next day. Prepare a homemade dressing without mayonnaise, using a 50-50 oil/vinegar mix and other liquids like fruit juices. This not only cuts fat but helps keep foods safer at room temperature. In starchy salads, substitute whole-grain pasta for white pasta. Try sweet potatoes instead of white potatoes, or a brown rice, quinoa, or couscous salad as an alternative to white rice/pasta.

Pack light and crunchy appetizers— Pack your cooler with a variety of crisp, raw veggies like cucumbers, carrots, celery, pepper strips, and cherry tomatoes. Take along a nutritious dip such as hummus, salsa, bean dip, or low-fat yogurt dip with herbs and spices. Consider stuffing celery with peanut butter, or baked pita chips with guacamole or salsa. To make *baked pita chips*, split large whole-wheat pita bread rounds into 8 wedges, brush with olive oil, sprinkle with desired spices (such as garlic powder, salt, pepper, or basil), and arrange in a single layer on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake at 350° for about 15 minutes, or until wedges are lightly browned and crisp. Watch carefully as they can burn quickly!

Keep your food safe— When preparing at home, tightly pack cold food into one cooler with reusable ice packs, and pack drinks in a separate cooler. You can freeze juice boxes or water bottles to pack with foods to keep them colder. Pack warm/hot foods separately from cold foods. For all day events, don't eat any food that has been out for over 4 hours, and discard any leftovers prone to becoming unsafe, such as dairy, meats, fish, tofu, eggs, cooked rice, sprouts, sliced melon or tomatoes, and mayonnaise-based salads. For more info on food safety, check out the website homefoodsafety.org.

See next page for strategies to pack healthier beverages and desserts at your next picnic.

Source: www.Nutrition411.com and www.webmd.com

Tuna Pasta Salad

6 servings

Source: SparkPeople recipes

- 4 c cooked pasta (try a whole grain variety)
- 2 (5 oz) cans tuna packed in water, drained*
- ¼ red or yellow onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp capers (optional)**
- 4 Tbsp olive oil
- 6 Tbsp balsamic, red wine vinegar or combination
- Salt and pepper to taste

- 1 c chopped raw vegetables (bell pepper, shredded carrot, celery, tomato, zucchini, cabbage, or whatever else is in season or on hand)

* May substitute one (14.75 oz) can of salmon for the tuna
** May replace capers with peas and add ½ tsp of salt.

Nutrition Facts: Calories 208, Fat 10 gm, Saturated Fat 1 gm, Sodium 278 mg, Carbs 13 gm, Fiber 1 gm, Protein 16 gm

Directions: Combine cooked pasta and tuna in a large bowl. Mix in cut up raw vegetables, capers or thawed frozen peas, and onion. Add salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar. Toss thoroughly. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

*Barbecues, picnics and family gatherings are never complete without dessert, right? On a warm day we like to have refreshing and cool beverages to go along with our tasty eats. However, those drinks and sweet desserts can contribute many surplus sugar calories. Water is the ideal choice for hydration, and you can freeze or partially freeze your water bottle to stay cool. Sometimes you crave something with a sweet flavor, but want to minimize sugar intake. Here are some ideas for healthy beverage choices that will cut out the typical 8 teaspoons of sugar in an 8 ounce lemonade, 4-6 teaspoons per cup of pre-sweetened iced tea or 10 teaspoons in a 12 ounce can of soda. See the recipe below for a delicious **gluten-free brownie** dessert that incorporates high protein and high fiber black beans, that you don't taste or see.*

BEVERAGES— Make your own lemonade or iced tea and add just a couple of teaspoons of sugar, or use artificial sweeteners like Splenda or Stevia. Try mixing 4 ounces of fruit juice with 8 ounces of unsweetened seltzer for a natural bubbly fruit juice “soda”. Dilute sweetened lemonade or iced tea with seltzer or extra water. There are also convenient sugar-free iced teas, lemonade and diet sodas available. Seltzer with a lemon or lime wedge can be refreshing.

SUN TEA— Place 4-6 tea bags in a 2 quart clear glass container and add 1½ quarts of cold water. If desired, add a tsp of minced fresh mint leaves or a thinly sliced 2 inch piece of fresh ginger. Cover and let stand in the sun for 2 to 3 hours. Remove teabags, sweeten to taste (suggestion: maximum of 5 Tbsp sugar), and serve with ice and lemon wedges if desired.

'INFUSED WATER'— Don't care for the taste of plain water? Try these ideas: chop 1 cup fresh strawberries and slice thin and de-seed 2 lemons. Add to a 2-quart pitcher and press down with back of spoon. Add 2 quarts water and chill for 4 hours or overnight to let flavors mingle. Another option is 4 cups chopped watermelon with 6 sprigs of lightly crushed mint leaves, or 2 sliced peaches with 1 cup blueberries and a small thinly sliced cucumber. Sliced oranges and limes are great too!

DESSERTS— Pack fresh fruit, fruit salad or prepare a colorful fruit platter. Watermelon is a seasonal favorite, as are berries, cherries, and peaches. Serve fruit before the rest of the desserts. Dried dates and figs are sweet and travel well. If you decide to bring cookies, cake, or brownies, portion control is key to not over-indulging. You may want to bring only enough to give everyone one (or maybe one and a half) portions. Pre-portion the servings, so everyone gets a piece, but is not tempted to take too large of a piece. For cake, consider angel food cake topped with fresh berries and a spoonful of light whipped topping or low-fat vanilla yogurt.

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND— Often we tend to eat too much dessert, because it sits on the table and we graze on it for the rest of the afternoon or evening. Think about clearing desserts (other than fruit) from the table about 30 minutes after serving. This gives guests enough time to get dessert, but not so much time that they go back for seconds that they did not really want. Those who feel like snacking could enjoy fruit, beverages, or even some cut-up vegetables.

Source: www.Nutrition411.com and www.webmd.com

Fudgy Black Bean Brownies

16 brownies

Source: MealMakeoverMoms.com

- 1 (15 oz) can black beans, drained & rinsed
- 3 large eggs
- 3 Tbsp canola oil
- ¾ c sugar
- ½ c unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ tsp baking powder
- Pinch of salt

- ½ c semi-sweet chocolate chips (regular or mini)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- *Optional: ½ tsp peppermint extract*

Nutrition Facts: Calories 135, Fat 6 gm, Saturated Fat 2 gm, Sodium 121 mg, Carbohydrate 19 gm, Fiber 2 gm, Sugars 14 gm, Protein 3 gm

Directions: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly oil or coat an 8x8-inch baking pan or dish with non-stick cooking spray and set aside. Place the black beans in the bowl of a food processor and process until smooth and creamy. Add the eggs, oil, sugar, cocoa powder, vanilla extract, baking powder, salt, and peppermint extract if desired. Process until smooth. Add ¼ cup of chocolate chips and pulse a few times until the chips are incorporated. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, smooth the top with a rubber spatula and sprinkle with the remaining ¼ cup chocolate chips. Bake 30-35 minutes or until the edges start to pull away from the sides of the pan and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan before slicing into 2-inch squares. Serve and enjoy!