

Plenty of healthy food tastes good, too

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COX NEWS SERVICE November 14, 2006

There's no need to develop a taste for tofu and bean sprouts if you don't really like them. Choosing foods to improve the quality of your diet should start with recognizing what you're already doing right.

Anytime you add more vegetables to a meal, use less cheese, choose leaner meats, grab the whole-grain version of breads and go easy on the butter and oil, you're right in step with a healthier diet.

So rather than try to persuade you to try chickpea cakes with flaxseed granola or some other super-nutritious-sounding food, let's celebrate some of the dishes you might be enjoying already but might not have been aware were so healthy.

BARBECUED CHICKEN. Batter and deep-fry a 5-ounce chicken breast, and you're looking at 500 calories. But if the same size chicken breast is dressed up in barbecue sauce instead, then roasted or grilled, it will be 350 calories. Want some more sauce to moisten the meat at the table? Most barbecue sauces contain only 15 calories per tablespoon.

PEEL-AND-EAT SHRIMP. The USDA Food Guide Pyramid recommends we add fish and shellfish to mix up our protein choices. Shrimp is exceptionally low in fat, especially if you keep them that way by enjoying boiled shrimp (one-fourth of a pound equals 112 calories and 1 gram fat) instead of fried (274 calories, 15 grams fat). Peel-and-eat shrimp often is boiled with a spicy seasoning, so all you need is a squeeze of lemon and you're ready to dig in. And because all that peeling takes some time, it slows you down a bit – another plus for keeping portions in control. Yes, shrimp contains some cholesterol, but because it is so low in total fat, it's considered a healthy choice.)

SIRLOIN STEAK. If you're going out for a steak dinner, ordering a sirloin can help you save on your food-dollar budget and your fat and calorie budget. Not as pricey as filet mignon or porterhouse, the sirloin cut also is one of the leanest. A 6-ounce sirloin steak, strip steak or London broil has about 360 calories and 16 grams of fat. Splurge on the same size serving of prime rib or ribeye, and you're looking at an additional 100 calories and 10 grams of fat. Want some sauce? Two tablespoons of steak sauce has 30 calories.

SPRING ROLLS. No, not the deep-fried egg roll kind – sorry. But you can dig in and enjoy the Thai basil rolls popular on many restaurant menus today. Wrapped in chilled rice paper and filled with fresh veggies and maybe shrimp or chicken, they are a low-calorie, high-fiber finger food full of crunch and flavor. Low-calorie dipping sauces range from sweet and spicy to pungent fish sauces.

-Printed in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*