

Prepare brownies like these quickly

Whipping up a homemade dessert is probably the last thing that working women — and some working men, too — want to contemplate when they get home. Even if the dessert is for tomorrow or later in the week, the idea of spending additional hours in the kitchen can put off just about anyone.

However, tasty desserts that also are nutritious can be easy to prepare in a short time. Two examples are Peanutty Brownies and Sour Cream 'N' Nut Cupcakes, delectable edibles made with unsalted nuts. They are loaded with protein, carbohydrates and vitamins and have the added nutritional advantage of being practically sodium free.

What's more, these simple treats can double as health snacks. They're perfect for between-meal snacking, offering taste and nutrition.

PEANUTTY BROWNIES

Makes 25 squares
4 (1 ounce) squares unsweetened chocolate
1/2 cup margarine
2 cups sugar
4 eggs, slightly beaten
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup chopped unsalted cocktail peanuts

In medium saucepan, melt chocolate and margarine over low heat. Remove from heat; thoroughly mix in sugar. Stir in eggs. Beat in vanilla and flour. Spread batter in greased 9-inch square

pan. Sprinkle remaining chopped peanuts over top of batter.

Bake 325 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes. Cool in pan or wire rack. Cut into squares to serve.

SOUP CREAM 'N' NUT CUPCAKES

Makes 1 1/2 dozen
1 cup dry roasted unsalted peanuts, coarsely chopped
1 cup sugar
2 Tbsp. grated orange peel
1/4 cup cake flour
1/4 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
4 cups margarine
2 eggs
1 cup dairy sour cream
1 tsp. vanilla extract

In small bowl, combine dry roasted unsalted peanuts, 1/4 cup sugar and orange peel; set aside.

Sift together cake flour, baking powder and baking soda. In large bowl, with electric mixer at medium speed, cream margarine and remaining 1/4 cup sugar. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Mix together sour cream and vanilla. Alternately add the sour cream mixture and dry ingredients to the cream mixture, beating well after each addition. Spoon batter into paper-lined (2 1/4 inch) muffin pan cups, 3/4 full. Spoon a tablespoon of peanut mixture on top of each, lightly pressing into batter.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until done. Remove from pans and cool on wire racks.

Keep dinner light with stir fry

Light cooking is actually the preferred cooking method for 1980's active lifestyles. However, "light" doesn't necessarily refer to less filling meals.

Heart-healthy pasta

Pasta lovers can be tough customers when it comes to making changes in diet. But Italian recipes can be heart-healthy and still retain the qualities most admired by pasta connoisseurs — the dry is using low-fat meats and cheeses. This manicotti recipe features chicken breasts.

CHICKEN MANICOTTI

1/2 cup tomato juice
1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 tsp. oregano
1/4 tsp. margarine
1/4 tsp. basil
freshly ground black pepper
2 whole chicken breasts, skinned and boneless
4 ounces low-fat cottage cheese
2 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded

In a 1-quart saucepan over medium heat, bring tomato juice, garlic, 1/4 of seasonings and pepper to boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer mixture 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, on a cutting board with mallet or dull edge of French knife,

pound chicken pieces to about 1/4-inch thickness and set aside.

In a small bowl combine cottage cheese and remainder of seasonings. Spoon cheese mixture onto center of breast, leaving a 1/4-inch edge all around. From a narrow end, roll each breast, jelly-roll fashion. In bottom of 10-by-6-inch baking dish, spoon half of the tomato juice mixture, then arrange chicken rolls seam-side down. Spoon remaining tomato juice mixture over chicken rolls, top with mozzarella cheese and bake at 350 degrees F for about 45 minutes or until chicken is tender.

Yield: 4 Servings
Approx. Calvry: 230

Recipe tip: Poultry carries a layer of fat under the skin and several large deposits near the tail. The latter are easily removed. When you are roasting a chicken whole, you should leave the skin on to keep the meat from drying out. However, individual pieces of chicken should be skinned to remove the layer of fat.

It can also refer to meals containing smaller portions of food or fewer calories.

One way to give menus a lighter approach is to prepare colorful and nutritious Beef 'n' Eggplant Stir-Fry. It is made with basic ingredients — today's leaner beef, fresh vegetables, such as eggplant and red pepper, and spinach linguini. The beef cut chosen for this particular recipe is flank steak. It is a boneless cut of beef from the hindquarter which contains elongated muscle fibers and very little fat. This lean beef cut contains just 190 calories for a single, three-ounce serving, which is important for today's calorie-conscious consumers.

Beef is a versatile meat source that can be prepared in many different ways to match the diet and time constraints facing many Americans today. For example, the flank steak can be cut into thin strips and quickly cooked using the popular stir-fry technique. Stir the ingredients constantly during cooking so they heat evenly and quickly.

Another benefit of the quick stir-frying method is that it helps retain the nutrients present in the food. While our bodies need about 50 different nutrients every day, scientists have found that if we get the proper amount of 10 major nutrients, we'll probably get enough of the other 40. Beef 'n' Eggplant Stir-Fry supplies significant amounts of the daily requirements of many of the major nutrients — 116 percent of daily vitamin C requirements, 76 percent of protein needs, 46 percent of niacin, 37 percent of phosphorus, 35 percent of iron, 31 percent of thiamin, 30 percent of vitamin A and

27 percent of riboflavin.

To keep this nutritious meal "light and easy," serve an assortment of fresh fruits for dessert.

BEEF 'N' EGGPLANT STIR-FRY

Preparation time: 25 minutes
Cooking time: 25 to 30 minutes
1 beef flank steak (1 to 1 1/4 pounds)
4 Tbsp. dry red wine, divided
1/4 cup CHX dried basil leaves, dried oregano leaves and salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
1 eggplant (approximately 1 pound), pared, cut into 2 by 1/4 inch strips
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup 3 strip olive oil, divided
1 large red pepper, cut into thin strips
1 Tbsp. cornstarch
1/4 cup beef broth
2 cups cooked spinach linguini
1 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese

Partially freeze steak to firm. Cut steak in half lengthwise; slice each half diagonally across the grain into thin slices (knife should be almost parallel to cutting surface). Combine 1 tablespoon wine, basil, oregano, salt and pepper; sprinkle over meat. Stir-fry eggplant and garlic in 1 tablespoon hot oil in wok or large non-stick frying pan 8 to 10 minutes or until eggplant is transparent. Add red pepper and continue cooking 2 minutes. Remove from pan; reserve. Stir-fry beef strips (1/4 at a time) in remaining oil 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from pan; reserve. Combine cornstarch with beef broth. Stir into drippings with remaining wine and cook until thickened, stirring occasionally. Stir in reserved beef strips and vegetables and heat through. Combine linguini and Parmesan cheese. Serve beef stir-fry over linguini. 4 servings.

Phyllo leaves can update a casserole

Tired of the same old standard casseroles? They're a great American dinner tradition and an easy way to stretch the family's food dollar. But sometimes a casserole can seem so "ordinary." To give a classic casserole an up-to-date approach, prepare a Spanish "picadillo" baked in trend-setting Greek phyllo leaves.

This unusual and unique flavor and ingredient combination is a welcome addition to family meals. "Picadillo" is a highly seasoned, ground or shredded beef dish. It can be prepared either as a main dish casserole, as in Beef Picadillo on Phyllo, or used as a filling for tortillas. Raisins, nuts, onions, tomatoes and spices are typical additions to this dish.

Ground beef is the main ingredient of this tasty Spanish-flavored casserole. The beef is packaged and sold according to its fat content — from 70 percent lean to as high as 90 percent lean. The leanness of the meat you choose will depend on personal preference and price.

The Greek phyllo leaves are used in this recipe for two reasons. First, they act as a casing for the seasoned beef mixture. Second, they add a decorative accent to the finished dish. These surprisingly thin sheets of pastry can be found in the frozen food section of your supermarket.

To prepare this recipe, line the bottom and sides of the casserole dish with five layers of phyllo leaves. Brush each layer with butter to give the pastry its characteristic rich and flaky texture. After filling the casserole with the beef mixture, decorate the edge of the baking dish with one-inch wide strips of phyllo.

A simple salad is all that's needed to complete this family or company meal.

BEEF PICADILLO ON PHYLLO

Preparation time: 30 to 40 minutes
Cooking time: 50 minutes
1 1/2 lb. ground beef
1 medium onion, chopped
1 medium green pepper, chopped
1/2 cup butter, divided
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
1/4 cup raisins
1 Tbsp. capers, drained
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
6 sheets (approximately 6 oz.) phyllo leaves, divided
1/4 cup sliced pimiento-stuffed olives

Cook onion and green pepper in 2 Tbsp. butter in large frying pan over medium heat 5 minutes. Stir in ground beef and garlic and cook until browned. Pour off drippings. Add tomato sauce, raisins, capers, salt and cinnamon and cook slowly 15 minutes. Stir in olives; reserve. Meanwhile melt remaining butter. Lightly butter bottom and sides of 11 by 7 1/2-inch baking dish. Fold each sheet of phyllo crosswise to fit bottom and sides of baking dish; brush lightly with butter. Repeat with 4 additional phyllo leaves, lightly brushing each with butter. Spoon beef mixture into baking dish. Cut one sheet of phyllo into strips about 1 inch wide; place strips in layers around outer edge of baking dish, lightly brushing each with butter until all used. Bake in hot oven (400 degrees) 25 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving. 6 servings.

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