

## One pot meal protein packed

Protein plays an essential role in maintaining health, but many health experts are calling into question the amount of protein Americans normally eat. Since our meals typically focus on meat, poultry, eggs, cheese and other protein-rich foods, we often consume as much as twice the amount of protein we need each day. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, the recommended daily allowance of protein is 50 grams for women ages 25-50, and 63 grams for men.

Studies have shown that countries where people eat large amounts of animal protein have a higher incidence of heart disease, diabetes and colon or breast cancer. However, although high-protein foods such as meat and dairy products are often high in fat — which is known to increase cancer risk — not enough is known about protein itself to rule it out as a potential cancer risk factor.

Until further research is done on the health effects of protein, the American Institute for Cancer Research recommends choosing low-fat protein sources as part of a healthful diet. Eating skim and low-fat dairy prod-

ucts and extra-lean cuts of meat is a good start, particularly in modest portions (three or four ounces of meat per meal). It is easier to cut back by replacing some animal protein with extra plant protein from dried beans, potatoes, pasta, rice, or corn, and use just a little meat or cheese for flavor. Whole-grain cereals and breads are also good protein sources.

Look at protein as an important part of your diet, but not the most important part. Most Americans can cut back on protein without jeopardizing their health. By shifting the focus of your meals to give equal attention to meats, fruits, vegetables and grains, you can provide better balance to your diet and help avoid health problems associated with an excess or deficiency of any important nutrients.

Lentil Rice Delight provides a meal in one pot, since the lentils and rice combined make a good low-fat protein source. The fat and calorie content is already fairly low for a whole meal; however, you can reduce it even more by substituting white wine, low-fat broth, or water for the oil.



**One pot meal:** Lentil Rice Delight provides a meal in one pot, since the lentils and rice combined make a good low-fat protein source.

### LENTIL RICE DELIGHT

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tablespoon oil (or use 2 Tablespoons white wine, low-fat broth or water for less fat)
- ¾ cup brown rice, uncooked
- ½ teaspoon curry powder
- 2½ cups water
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup lentils, rinsed
- 1½ Tablespoons lemon juice
- 5 ounces frozen spinach (or ½ pound fresh spinach, stems removed)

Saute the chopped onion and garlic in the oil (or white wine,

broth or water). Add the rice and curry; saute 1 or 2 minutes more. Add the water, salt, lentils and lemon juice, and simmer 45 minutes, covered. Add the spinach and simmer a few more minutes until the spinach is tender.

If a spicier flavor is desired, add a dash of hot pepper sauce or chili powder before serving.

Each of the 2 servings (2 cups each) contains 9 grams of fat and 480 calories.

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## Substitutions cut fat in classic Italian dish

AP — Whipping cream, bacon, eggs and cheese load classic carbonara down with fat and cholesterol. But that doesn't mean you have to forgo this great-tasting Italian dish. With a few ingredient substitutions, you perform a delicious and healthy recipe makeover.

■ Use evaporated skim milk in the sauce. It's a flavorful alternative for cream, has fewer calories and almost no fat.

■ Trade bacon. Once for ounce, turkey bacon has half the fat of pork bacon.

■ Oust the butter. The original recipe had 4 tablespoons of butter; the new one has none.

■ Add peas, please. Lean peas and red sweet pepper flavor the carbonara sauce and add color.

■ Cook the egg. Concerned about eating raw eggs? You cook the egg for this healthful carbonara sauce.

■ Sprinkle lightly with Parmesan cheese. Just a little goes a long way.

### SPAGHETTI ALLA CARBONARA

- 8 ounces linguine or spaghetti
- Nonstick spray coating
- 2 slices turkey bacon, sliced crosswise into strips
- 1 beaten egg
- 1 cup evaporated skim milk
- ½ cup frozen peas

- ¼ cup chopped red sweet pepper
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ cup freshly shredded or grated Parmesan cheese (about 2 ounces)
- Ground black pepper

Cook linguine or spaghetti according to package directions. Meanwhile, spray a medium saucepan with nonstick coating. Cook bacon in saucepan until crisp and light brown. Drain on paper towels. Wipe saucepan clean with a paper towel.

For sauce, in the same saucepan combine egg, milk, peas, sweet pepper and crushed red pepper. Cook and stir over medium heat just until the mixture coats a metal spoon (about 6 minutes). Do not boil. Stir in bacon and half of the Parmesan cheese. Heat through.

Immediately pour sauce over hot, cooked pasta; toss gently to coat. Transfer to warmed serving platter. Sprinkle with remaining Parmesan cheese and black pepper. Serve immediately. Makes 4 main-dish servings.

**Nutrition information per serving:**  
383 cal., 7 g fat, 71 mg chol., 22 g pro., 56 g carbs., 362 mg sodium, 1 g fiber. RDA: 41 percent calcium, 20 percent iron, 17 percent vit. A, 38 percent thiamine, 36 percent riboflavin, 21 percent niacin.

## Don't wait until Thanksgiving to enjoy sweet potatoes



LOIS THIELEKE

It's a pity that we only use sweet potatoes at the holidays. Sweet potatoes are among the most nutritious foods in the vegetable family. A sweet potato has an enzyme that converts most of the starch to sugar as it matures.

This natural sweetener increases during storage and when it's cooked. The sweet potato is a member of the morning glory family and not related to the white potato, as many people think, but can be seen if you compare the leafy vines.

Because of their name or the heavy amounts of sweetener added to them in their "candied" ver-

sion, sweet potatoes sound fattening. A sweet potato has no more calories by weight than a white potato. A four-ounce serving of cooked sweet potato contains just 120-140 calories and nearly half the daily recommended dietary allowance for vitamin C. It also contains two to five times the recommended amounts for beta carotene (which the body transforms into vitamin A). The darker the orange color of the vegetable, the more beta carotene.

A serving of sweet potato has more potassium than an orange, plus three grams of dietary fiber. Handle sweet potatoes gently. They may look rugged, but the skin is quite thin and can be easily damaged. Don't wash sweet potatoes until you are ready to cook them. The moisture hastens spoilage.

### Buying tips

You can buy sweet potatoes in two versions: The light-skinned tuber with yellow pulp; and the moist, rough-skinned one that's bright orange when cooked. Most people call this a "yam." However, a true yam is a starchy white root grown in West Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America and is seldom found here in our markets.

Sweet potatoes are available year 'round. Buy bruise-free sweet potatoes, ones that feel heavy for their size and taper toward the ends. Avoid any with discolored or moldy ends because decay can spread quickly. Buy only the amount you can use within a few days. Raw sweet potatoes should not be refrigerated. Cooked ones keep well in the refrigerator or freezer and can be prepared in ad-

vance for later use. Add a little lemon juice to keep them from darkening before freezing.

### Cooking methods

Sweet potatoes are easy to cook: You can bake, microwave or boil them. Always cook them in their skins to conserve vitamins. The skin slip off easily after cooking but are also edible. To bake, pierce with a fork to let steam escape. Place sweet potatoes on a foil-lined baking sheet to catch the sticky juices. Microwaving sweet potatoes is very easy: Pierce and set on a paper towel. There is no need to peel them to boil; slip the skin later.

Very little butter or sugar are needed for sweet potatoes since they are naturally sweet. Slice cooked sweet potatoes into a sauce pan with a little apple juice

or cider and cook over low heat until the liquid makes a glaze. Whip cooked sweet potatoes with orange peel and orange juice or pineapple juice and season with cinnamon or ginger.

Combine sweet potatoes with white potatoes for a delicious potato salad, or make a sweet potato salad with celery, red or green pepper, and scallions. Toss this with a low-fat yogurt flavored with lemon juice and herbs. Sweet potatoes make wonderful French fries. Twice-baked sweet potatoes are made easily. After baking, scoop out the pulp, mash it and add crushed pineapple or diced apples and raisins, add some cinnamon or ginger and return to the skins to reheat. Instead of using marshmallows on the top of mashed baked potatoes, decorate the top with pecans or walnuts

and drizzle a little maple syrup on the top.

Puree baked or boiled potatoes to make sweet potato soup. Add defatted chicken stock with herbs and spices. Before serving, stir in low-fat buttermilk or yogurt. Pureed sweet potatoes can be added to breads, muffins or pies. Keep your baked goods low in fat by using skim milk and egg whites instead of cream and whole eggs.

Sweet potatoes are a neglected vegetable except at holidays. Since they are so nutritious try using them more frequently in interesting and delicious ways that your family will enjoy.

Lois Thieleke of Birmingham is an extension home economist for the Cooperative Extension Service, Oakland County office.

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