

KITCHEN KAPERS



KEN ABRAMCZYK

*Lighten up,
it's OK to
look your age*

Here come the diets. Here they come, one by one. No meat, low-fat, all-protein, soy, all vegetarian, no vegetarian, all cabbage, all liquid, Dr. Atkins, et cetera, et cetera. "Diet." Ugh. Even the word is dreadful in its terse shortness. You can almost envision a judge sitting on the bench in a long robe, saying: "I sentence you to 10 months of... dieting."

Please, I know weight-loss is serious stuff. But let's not get preachy here and box ourselves into months of frustration and desperation as we try to whip ourselves into shape 20-year-olds. Lighten up, it's OK to look your age. It means you are a survivor and a realist.

If you are one of the millions out there undertaking the eternal quest to lose weight, do yourself a big favor: Don't pressure yourself to fail.

What works

What works for me — and it may or may not work for you — is to enjoy all the things you did during the holidays, but in moderation. (Before you exercise, check with your doctor so you don't have a heart attack.)

Go for walks frequently. Walk around the exercise track at your neighborhood park or school, tackle the Stairmaster, ride a stationary bike, do aerobics, or take a walk in the mall. Go cross-country skiing or ski downhill, ice skating. Stand up every 30 minutes and walk away from your computer. Go to a show at the Novi Expo Center or some other arena, and walk and explore exhibits with a friend.

Hey, the holidays are over. If you are like most people, you won't be tempted by family members and friends with rich desserts and main courses. You're already cutting calories, and you didn't even realize it.

Take comfort

This is comfort food time, but you can still enjoy some wonderful main courses without piling on extra calories.

Make homemade soup. Spend a Saturday morning preparing beef and chicken stock, and use them in soups, stews, risotto, or pot pies. Call a friend you missed over the holidays and see if he or she has any favorite comfort food recipes to share. Prepare a recipe together and take "comfort" in each other's company.

Braise a chicken or a roast, mix potatoes, carrots and/or peas with thyme or rosemary. Shrimp creole or

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**Go
ahead...**

Bowl us over!

Got the crew over to watch a little football today or planning to for the Super Bowl? Did you, a friend or another family member prepare a particular dish to enjoy during the recent college bowl games?

We'd love to hear from you about your favorite football dish or any hearty winter dish, whether it's homemade sausage, wing dings, barbecue beef brisket or shrimp. We'd like to hear about the healthier foods too, that you use to balance that meal, such as vegetables or fruits or desserts to top off the big game.

Send a short write-up, including recipes, to Ken Abramczyk, Taste Editor, Observer Newspapers, 38251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail him at kabramczyk@oe.hometown.com with a daytime phone number.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Super stuff
- Culinary Adventure

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COLD COMFORT



*Winter too long?
Raise your spirits
while still watching
your calories*

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

What is your comfort food? Chicken soup? Meatloaf? Cinnamon rolls? Hot cocoa with marshmallows? Comfort food is more than just good-tasting food. It evokes diverse

underlying emotions and memories. People connect past associations between foods and people or important events in their lives.

Comfort foods warm the body and the soul and connect us with special people, places and times. They are nurturing, wholesome, soul-satisfying, calming and rejuvenating.

A New Year's challenge

The first month of the New Year is often a time for reflection and renewed commitments. Many of us desire to improve our health and this could mean shedding a few extra pounds.

Cold weather can make losing weight more challenging because hearty comfort foods may also be higher in calories and fat. As with other times of the year, eating well means eating wisely.

Healthy eating does not mean you have to "give up" your favorite foods. Exercising balance, moderation, and choosing a variety of foods will help you reach your weight loss goals. Hunger isn't the only reason we eat. Certain foods can be emotionally satisfying, and it is said that think that some people view their favorite soul-satisfying food as being "bad" for them.

Exercise makes life better

Just like good eating habits, adding physical activity to your day improves the quality of your life. Exercise for the health of it — not just to lose weight. Go outside and get some fresh air and enjoy the sunlight. It will also improve your frame of mind.

Choose activities that are fun and relaxing, and do them consistently. Remember what mom used to say — "go outside and play."

Soups and stews are comforting to anyone who has been outside enjoying Michigan's winter. After working up an appetite skating, sledding, skiing, ice fishing or just walking in the snow, it's truly rewarding to walk

inside a warm house that's filled with aromas of slowly simmering soup or stew.

Under the weather?

Because we tend to spend most of our time indoors during the winter, germs are more readily passed. The flu and colds are prevalent.

When you're sick, eat whatever your body "tells you" would feel good. During times of illness, our bodies need the same nutrients as during times of wellness, maybe just in different amounts.

Never underestimate the power of fluids. Cold weather outside and dry air inside can wreak havoc on our bodies. The human body is about 60 to 65 percent water by weight. So drink up when you're ill, but go easy on juice drinks, bottled flavored waters and caffeinated beverages. (High sugar drinks and caffeine can rob your body of fluids because of their hyperosmolar (high water-loving) and diuretic (thigh urine-producing) effect.)

Protein is an important building block for our body. However, we usually consume too much protein; our body uses what it needs, then stores the rest as fat.

Try protein when ill

When you're ill, some nice soft protein foods can help make you feel better.

A scrambled egg with toast, a nice chicken casserole or a tender beef stew are all nutritious and comforting foods.

Carbohydrates are always an important part of our diet. Grains, vegetables and fruits always work well.

A baked potato (cooked quickly in the microwave) moistened with some low-fat milk and seasoned with a little paprika can feel like a meal. A bowl of cereal with a banana or a hot dish of succotash are light and nutritious meals. Some people can't handle

coarse or acidic foods like raw vegetables or stewed tomatoes, so let your body be your guide.

Whether you're sick or well, a general multivitamin/mineral supplement probably won't hurt, and an orange or a glass of orange juice is good for you. But will mega doses of Vitamin C cure the common cold? Probably not.

Just stick to those sensational carbohydrates and lots of fluids and save your money for Valentine's Day goodies.

Laurana Kayne and Norma Bennerman have published a series of Comfort Food cookbooks. You can find them from the publisher, Hummingbird Wings in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, or visit www.cadvision.com/nollind/efcb/ for information. A recipe included in today's Taste section was adapted from their Old-Fashioned Chicken Pot Pie, which is great on a cold, winter day. The other recipe is a Mexican Stew, courtesy of Rachael Soules of Livonia. This spicy dish is perfect after a day on the ski slopes!

Peggy Martinelli-Everts, R.D., a Clarkston resident, is a registered dietitian and director of clinical operations for HDS Services, a 35-year-old Farmington-Hills based food service and hospitality management and consulting company, specializing in food service management for hospitals, long-term care facilities, businesses, private clubs and private schools.

Here are some tips to enjoy comfort foods sensibly:

- Choose broth-based soups more often than cream-based soups. They are flavorful, filling and lower in fat than cream soups.
- Add a variety of vegetables, especially beans to soups, and you'll get a bowl full of protein, iron and fiber. Add body to homemade soup with pureed cooked vegetables.
- Think of a plate instead of the Food Guide Pyramid. Fill 2/3 of your plate with plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains and beans.

Host a 'Super' party and football fans will cheer

2 UNIQUE



KELLI LEWTON

It's usually a busy day for caterers, event planners and food and spirit establishments too. We have catered everything from huge lavish parties for advertising agencies waiting to see the million dollar ad they created hit the air waves to chili parties.

But most people will spend Super Bowl Sunday at home with family and friends. For something fun and creative this year,

host an indoor tailgating party.

Remember when planning your indoor tailgating party, keep it fun and lively. How about a cooler filled with bottled beers rather than storing them in the refrigerator? Try adding some other drinks to your repertoire this year such as a festive Bloody Mary bar with Tabasco or your favorite spicy sauce, seasonings, Bloody Mary mix and celery. Turn it up a notch with horseradish, pickles, marinated veggies, course salt and an assortment of vodkas, like the new pepper varieties. (Of course, any alcohol should be enjoyed in moderation, and keep plenty of soft drinks or hot non-alcoholic drinks for the teetotalers.)

Serve something warm and wonderful to end the evening such as a warm winter peppermint patty coffee or cocoa drink. Spiced dark rum and warm cider are always crowd-pleasers.

Food scores a touchdown!

Staying in the indoor tailgating zone I would recommend a snack-grazing style menu.

Party hosts can feature such items as chili, or try a new version such as white bean chicken chili, eight-bean veggie chili or venison or Italian sausage chili to beef up the kick-off buffet.

An assortment of petite baguette sandwiches including beef sandwiches topped with balsamic onions and roasted peppers and turkey with brie and honey mustard will keep your guests coming back for more. Quesadilla triangles are always a sure hit with beer and football, shrimp, roasted veggie, and barbecue pork are just a few flavors to serve.

Think of quesadillas as you would a grilled sandwich with the soft tortillas being the bread. Mix your ingredients — including cheeses, herbs and spices — and place between flour tortillas. Grill

in a flat pan with a little oil until brown on both sides. You can over grill them earlier in the day then reheat on a flat cookie tray. Once warmed, slice into pie-style wedges and serve with appropriate condiments.

Chicken wings usually go over well as does seven layer, black bean style dips with tortilla chips. Don't forget spinach dip presented in a bread bowl. Pick up a few cone dogs and cut them into thirds.

Desserts: Field Goal

Simple is good, and less is more for a gathering such as football.

Try chocolate chip cookies, brownies and nut bars. Chocolate covered pretzels, brittle and assorted Rice Krispie treats are sure to please even the fussiest eaters in your football crowd. Try sprinkling some crushed Oreos! Butterfingers or Heath candy pieces.

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