

Sunday, December 23, 2001

The Beer Diet as a New Year's Resolution? It could happen!

I'm sure you've heard the rumor before ... the one that gives beer the unjustified reputation of being a high-calorie beverage. Most people actually believe this to be true and will stay away from beer (known to me as the "Nectar of the Gods") while watching their weight, but yet, will still consume wine and hard liquor because of their "it's only a couple of ounces" mentality. You'd be surprised how many calories other alcoholic beverages contain per ounce.

Let's take a look at the calorie content per ounce of some of your favorite libations:

1 oz champagne	25 Calories
1 oz vodka	66 Calories
1 oz Drambuie	110 Calories
1 oz red wine	25 Calories
1 oz wine cooler	20 Calories
1 oz bourbon	105 Calories
1 oz Pinot Colada	52 Calories
1 oz light beer	8 Calories
1 oz regular beer	13 Calories

Once for ounce, beer measures up extremely well in the calorie counting plans of holiday dieters. Actually, most of these beverages are not necessarily terrible for you - in terms of calories or otherwise - in moderation. Upon further investigation into the food side of things, I discovered what actually is bad for you. Check out the calorie counts for the following fast food and snack items. I was quite surprised at what I found (and, of course, I eat most of these):

1 oz regular beer	13 Calories
1 oz Baby Ruth bar	135 Calories
1 oz Fritos	165 Calories
1 oz potato chips	160 Calories
1 portion chili	448 Calories
1 Dairy Queen banana split	540 Calories
1 Big Mac	541 Calories
1 Whopper	650 Calories
1 handful mixed nuts	170 Calories

After looking at the figures for these foods - and nobody consumes just one ounce of them - it seems that overeating, of course, probably is the key to weight gain over the holiday season, NOT alcohol consumption. I have yet to find a problem with overeating and alcohol consumption, other than it causes my knees to hurt, my pants to not fit and often I don't remember my home telephone number. I do plan to spend this holiday season pairing great beer with festive holiday foods and have a good time. Maybe my New Year's resolution should be to invent the beer diet. Life is too short to not enjoy the things we love in moderation.

As always, never trust a skinny brewmaster.

Dan Jones is Brewmaster at the Big Rock Chop House, located at 245 S. Eton in Birmingham.

Try these dips with some chips

MUSHROOM PATÉ

- 10 oz mushrooms, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 Tbsp. tamari
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. ground thyme
- dash black pepper

Heat oil in heavy skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic, and sauté until onion begins to soften (be careful not to burn the garlic). Stir in the mushrooms, lower heat, and cook for about five minutes, stirring occasionally. Add all seasonings and stir to blend. Reduce heat and simmer for about ten more minutes. Remove from heat and adjust seasonings if necessary. Allow to cool a bit, then puree in a food processor or blender. Chill in a covered container until ready to serve. (Also freezes well.)

Source: <http://www.cattencorner.com/>

Please see D1's, D3



Politically correct: ... And delicious! This colorful Asian stir-fry dish was created by Inn Season Cafe's George Vutetakis and is relatively simple to make and can accommodate nearly any diet.

The Universal Meal

A politically correct meal to suit every diet and lifestyle this New Year's

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You're having a New Year's dinner and your niece, a vegetarian, is bringing a Hindu friend who is not only vegetarian but also avoids dairy. Your aunt is diabetic and her husband is following a high-protein, low-carb diet. You and your parents planned on cooking a traditional dinner for your Orthodox Jewish family - but the vast lifestyles and diet restrictions of family and friends spurs a change.

And, you don't have time to make four different meals to suit everyone. Imagine the dilemma of serving United Nations officials - so many religions and so many diets. On a smaller scale, that's what many American families deal with - a mini-melting pot at the holiday dinner table.

So, is there a great dish that can everyone can eat?

Well, yes. The answer: tofu stir fry. We asked this question of Chef George Vutetakis of the fantastically accommodating Inn Season restaurant on Fourth Street in Royal Oak. Creating interesting meals for all - including people with diet "restrictions" - is a specialty of Vutetakis. We asked him for an easy, delicious tofu stir-fry recipe - and as usual Vutetakis gave us an incredible one.

Cooking for people (with a variety) of diets can be fun and will add depth

to the cook's repertoire, he said. "Most old world cultures have vegetarian options in their cuisine. In cultures where the vegetarian diet is prevalent, most food is served in courses or in combinations that include a number of dishes. Each dish adds a nutritional and pleasing aspect to the meal."

But not everyone has time to create a variety of dishes. And, Vutetakis understands that problem. "Today, I would prepare one interesting dish and accompany it with some condiments or simple steamed or roasted vegetables. Taste, texture, color and presentation are important considerations. Foremost on my list, though, is how the food digests. Thus, I use time-tested traditional combinations and methods of cooking."

Heaven forbid a guest of the previous evening remembers your time together with a dose of indigestion, he said.

The Inn Season staff is capable of accommodating people with food allergies - in fact allergy-related issues represent nearly 30 percent of their clientele's special diet requests.

The Asian Stirfry dish is safe for just about every diet. Vutetakis said if a dinner guest is sensitive to alcohol, just skip the mirin. If garlic, onions or mushrooms is a problem replace it with bok choy or daiton radish.

And if they have a wheat allergy, use rice vermicelli and make sure the tamari (soy sauce) is wheat-free, he

recommends.

Tofu Tips

Tofu is based from soy and firm tofu can be mashed and enhanced with garlic, lemon juice and basil to mimic Ricotta cheese. Blended soft tofu, enhanced with nutmeg and sugar, can be used to replace eggs in eggnog.

And, it can be sliced into thick chunks as the main protein source in a stirfry. For stirfries, buy extra firm tofu - and for a great result, remove from the package, cover it in a plastic container and freeze it for 24 to 48 hours. The day it will be used, let it thaw naturally throughout the day and gently press down on the blocked tofu to remove excess water. Freezing tofu reduces the "rubbery" texture that some people complain about.

With or without freezing, here is Chef Vutetakis' creation.

ASIAN STIRFRY

- 1 - 8 oz block of firm tofu, sliced in 3/8" thick triangles
- 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 1 tsp. tamari
- 8 oz package Japanese udon noodles, soba noodles or somen noodles
- 3 carrots, peeled and julienned
- 1 sweet red pepper, sliced in thin spears
- 2 scallions, sliced at a thin angle cut
- 1 c pea pods or sugar snap peas, strings removed

- 2 c broccoli flowerettes, cut small to cook evenly with other vegetables
- 6 button mushrooms quartered
- 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced

- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper (*optional)
- 2 tsp. minced fresh ginger root

- 1 tsp. tamari sauce
- 1 cup mirin (* Japanese sweet rice wine)

1. Sauté the tofu with the tablespoon of sesame oil at medium heat in a well seasoned sauté pan or a non-stick pan. Lightly brown on each side. Add tamari and simmer for one minute. Set aside.

2. In a 2 quart sauce pan, bring 1 quart water to a boil. Add noodles, boil 5 to 7 minutes (read cooking instructions), drain and set aside.

3. Heat a small wok at medium high. Add sesame oil, garlic, ginger, crushed red pepper, then vegetables and tofu. Stir for 1 minute to incorporate garlic and ginger. Add tamari and mirin. Stir and sauté until vegetables are cooked but still retain a slight crunch. Quickly rinse noodles to loosen them, drain and add to stir fry. Serve immediately.

(Toasted sesame oil, mirin, tamari, udon noodles, soba noodles and somen noodles are available at most health food stores.)

Gypsy stew: A childhood favorite grows up

Gypsy Stew is a one-pot supper I learned to make when I was a Brownie Scout. Our troop boiled it up in a big pot suspended over an open fire on our first overnight camping trip. Back home, I proudly prepared it as my first complete meal. (My mother was a troop leader, so my father didn't dare eat less than thrilled.)

The foolproof recipe for this slurpy dish required one pot, a long-handled spoon and a can opener. A pound or more of ground meat went into the pot, followed by cans of condensed tomato soup, corn kernels, murky-green beans and beige-white, rubbery, peeled potatoes. Operating a can opener was the sole culinary skill required to produce this true classic of the 1950s: a vibrant, red-orange Sloppy Joe punctuated with the yellow, green and white of the vegetables. To truly appreciate this dish, remember it flourished in an era when oleo-margarine was sold as a white, semi-solid mass sealed in a plastic bag, to be tinted at home by kneading the embedded capsule of orange-colored oil into the fat until it turned a pale gold.

Gypsy-stew was a comfort food for my college roommates, who would request it on rainy Sundays when we stayed in, our faces covered with a zit-reducing mask while we laboriously painted our toe-nails and

lounged in front of the television.

As I became a so-called gourmet cook - how I now hate that label - I sautéed freshly chopped onions and green pepper with the meat. The mushy canned potatoes went, and I switched to using frozen corn and green beans. Next, thanks to my maturing taste, I replaced the canned tomato soup with cleaner-tasting canned tomatoes. This improved Gypsy Stew was served over rice.

Now, I use lean ground turkey instead of beef and add a can of beans, so that a mere half-pound of meat makes enough hearty stew to feed four generously.

GYPSY STEW

- 8 oz lean ground turkey breast or beef
- 1 Tbsp. canola oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup corn kernels, frozen or canned
- 1 can (15 oz) kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 (or 3, as desired) cups cooked brown rice
- 1 can (15 oz) diced tomatoes, drained

- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup firmly packed cilantro leaves, chopped

Coat a large, non-stick skillet with cooking spray and set it over medium-high heat. Cook meat until browned, breaking it up with a wooden spoon. Transfer meat to a bowl, and set aside.

Wipe out pan. Heat oil in pan over medium-high heat. Sauté onion, garlic and pepper until onion is translucent, 4 minutes. Add corn, beans, rice and tomatoes. Return meat to pan. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture is heated through. Mix in cilantro and serve.

Makes 4 servings. This stew is even better made a day ahead, then reheated. If planning to make it ahead, wait and add the rice when reheating it. This keeps the rice from getting hard.

Per serving: 367 calories, 6 g. fat (less than 1 g. saturated fat), 54 g. carbohydrate, 24 g. protein, 12 g. dietary fiber, 399 mg. sodium.

"Something Different" is written for the American Institute for Cancer Research by Dana Jacoby, author of "The Joy of Soy," and recipe creator for AICR's "Stopping Cancer Before It Starts."