



A Question of Taste

By Hillary Keating Callaghan

Scoreboard gives on-the-spot analysis of food nutrition

Just after Christmas, my sister-in-law Margaret made a gift to me of a chart entitled "Nutrition Scoreboard," put out by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. I think she may have given me the chart in order to get me to move from the spot beside her refrigerator where I was rooted, attempting to memorize the 300 or so bits of information contained in the copy of the Scoreboard she had posted there.

As the title implies, this poster attaches "scores" to a wide variety of foods, making it possible to compare them from an overall nutritional standpoint.

The scores are based on a simple system. Points are added according to the content of protein, fiber, naturally occurring sugars and starch, polyunsaturated fat, four vitamins (A, C, B-2, and B-3), and two minerals (iron and calcium). Points are subtracted for total fat content, saturated and monosaturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars.

There is undoubtedly room for quibbling about which factors were included or excluded. All in all, however, the Nutrition Scoreboard provides a reliable, shorthand analysis of a wide spectrum of foods for anyone lacking the time or training to do in-depth nutritional analysis on their own.

DEPENDENT ON one's eating patterns, it is possible to approach a rundown like this with a degree of smugness.

The villains are there, labeled in black and white. Coca Cola and other sodas are at the bottom, with a score of -55. Even Gatorade rates a -34, while Hershey's milk chocolate has a score of -42 and a chocolate éclair, -30. Commonly acknowledged junk foods all!

My satisfaction at seeing these foods vilified began to evaporate, however, as I came across the scores of some of my own favorite foods. Eggs ranked seven below zero and cheddar cheese 10 below. Fresh mushrooms rated a nine and avocado (the only high-fat vegetable) a six — both above zero, to be sure, but at the bottom of the vegetables listed and a far cry from fresh spinach which topped the list of vegetables at 92. The highest score on the entire chart went to fried beef liver (109) something I never particularly cared for even when I ate meat.

IT WAS ALL rather discouraging — enough to make one agree with cynics who hold that anything that tastes or feels good is bad for you. An alternative of course is simply to dismiss the rating system as inadequate.

I have a fair amount of respect for the CSPI, however, and also a liking, if not a respect, for neat numerical ranking systems. Perhaps the latter comes from years of schooling — test results, class rank, etc. The numbers always told you something — not always what you wanted to hear, but something.

Just before deciding to abandon all efforts to combine good taste with good nutrition as futile, I read over the recommendations of the CSPI: "Eat a varied diet composed mainly of grains and grain products (especially whole grains), fresh vegetables and fruits, poultry and fish, lowfat dairy products, lean meats, dried beans and nuts."

Nothing new here but not bad (or even spartan) either.

Some parts of this recommendation are easier to follow than others. Fresh fruits and vegetables, poultry and fish, for example, are a piece of cake (if you'll excuse the expression).

WHOLE GRAINS, on the other hand, are more of a problem for many people. Once we get beyond wheat (and that in the form of flour) and rice, most of us don't know what to do with whole grains. Whole rye. Triticale. Millet. Wheat berries. Buckwheat groats. What do you do with them?

Simply simmered in stock or water, most grains can act as side dishes (like rice) — hearty, nutritious, and economical fare.

(For anyone interested in obtaining a copy of "Nutrition Scoreboard," the address is: C.S.P.I., 1755 S. St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. I believe the price is \$2.

STUART'S CHOICE BREAKFAST CEREAL

- 2 cups cracked wheat
- 1 cup coarse cornmeal

Stir the cracked wheat and cornmeal together. Keep in a dry, cool place in an airtight container. To cook the cereal, bring 5 cups of water to a boil. Add ¼ to ½ teaspoon salt and slowly pour in one cup of the cereal mixture. Cook and stir for a minute or two, then cover and cook over very low heat (a double boiler is ideal) for 30 to 25 minutes. Milk may be used in place of water. Yield: 3½ cups.

(adapted from "Laurel's Kitchen" by Laurel Robertson, Carol Flinders, and Bronwen Godfrey)

MILLET-STUFFED PEPPERS

- 1 cup whole hulled millet
- 3 cups water
- Dash salt
- 4 medium green peppers, halved lengthwise and seeded
- ½ cup sesame oil
- 1½ cups chopped onions
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ cup sliced mushrooms
- 3 tsp. chopped parsley
- 1 tsp. oregano
- ½ tsp. basil
- 1 tsp. tamar (natural soy sauce)
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup cottage cheese
- 8 slices tomato
- Grated cheddar cheese

Put millet, water, and salt into a saucepan. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered, until tender, about 30 minutes. Drain if any excess liquid remains.

Steam pepper halves over boiling water for 5 minutes.

In a large skillet, heat the oil and saute the onions and garlic in it until tender. Add the mushrooms and cook 2 minutes longer.

Stir in the parsley, oregano, basil, and soy sauce.

Add the millet, eggs, and cottage cheese and cook, stirring gently, a minute or two. Fill the pepper halves with the millet mixture.

Set the peppers in a baking dish with ½-inch of hot water in the bottom. Top each pepper half with a tomato slice and some cheese.

Bake at 350-degrees for 25 to 30 minutes. Makes 4 servings. (From "The New York Times Natural Foods Cookbook")

KASHA WITH MUSHROOMS AND ONIONS

- 1 cup roasted buckwheat groats
- egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp. salt

- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 2 cups boiling water
- 2 large onions, cut into quarters
- ½ lb. mushrooms
- 1 green pepper, seeded, cut in half
- ¼ cup butter or margarine

Combine groats and egg in medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until egg is absorbed, 2 to 4 minutes. Add salt, pepper and boiling water; cook covered over low heat until water is absorbed, about 30 minutes.

Slice onions, mushrooms, and green pepper. Heat butter in skillet; saute onions, mushrooms and green pepper until soft, about 3 minutes.

Stir vegetables into groats. Cook over medium heat until hot, about 5 minutes. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

(adapted from "The Ultimate Food Processor Cookbook" by the editors of Consumer Guide)

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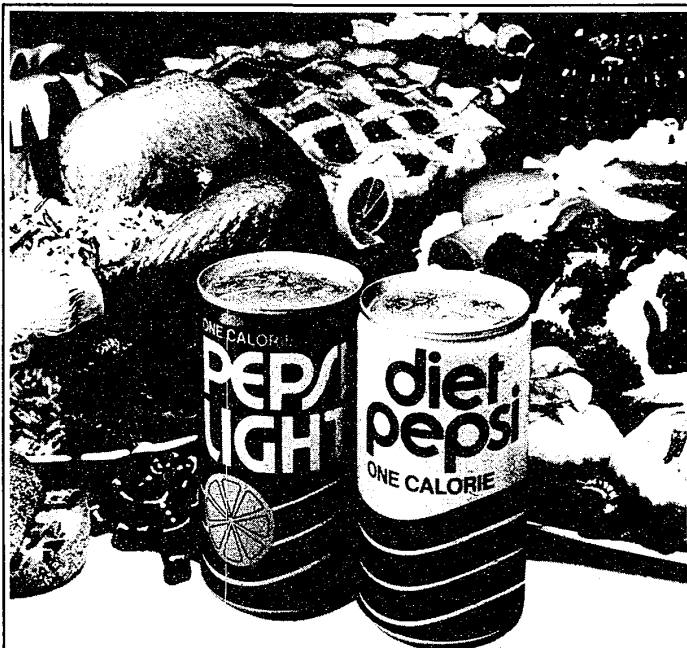
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Oatmeal gems are dotted with raspberry preserves

Old-fashioned oatmeal cookies, a famous drop cookie variety, become oatmeal gems when their centers are dotted with red raspberry preserves.

- OATMEAL GEMS**
- 1 cup margarine
 - ½ cup packed brown sugar
 - ½ cup granulated sugar
 - 2 eggs
 - 1 tsp. vanilla
 - 1½ cups flour
 - 1 tsp. cinnamon
 - 1 tsp. baking soda
 - 3 cups old fashioned or quick oats, uncooked
 - Red raspberry preserves

Cream margarine and sugars until light and fluffy. Blend in eggs and vanilla. Add combined flour, baking soda and cinnamon; mix well. Stir in oats. Drop heaping teaspoonful of dough onto greased cookie sheet. Indent centers. Fill with ¼ teaspoon preserves. Bake at 375 degrees 8 to 10 minutes or until golden brown. Makes approximately 4½ dozen.



Red raspberry preserves add a kid-loving touch to old-fashioned drop oatmeal cookies.

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