

Easy meals in 1 dish or bowl

These three dishes are ideal for on-the-go, nutrition-conscious cooks who want to prepare a delicious and attractive meal in minutes.

Each of the dishes — two entrees and a hearty salad — are prepared in one pan or bowl and combine ingredients commonly found in most kitchens. Making them perfect for these fast-paced days when meal time is limited. Yet they are tasty and attractive, and each contains less than 450 calories per serving.

Cheese-Topped Skillet Chicken and Rice and Two-Cheese Fettuccine Primavera are surprisingly simple to prepare. Mexican Cheddar Bean Salad is a restful cold salad that blends three types of beans and chicken for a perfect stand-alone light meal or a complement for others.

The dishes are lower-in calories and fat because they use reduced-fat cheese as well as other lower-fat ingredients. As a bonus, a special shopping trip may not be necessary because all three recipes call for ingredients that can be found in most kitchen refrigerators and pantries.

CHEESE-TOPPED Skillet Chicken and Rice, at 440 calories a serving, is made with chicken and rice, sautéed onions and garlic, a blend of spices and topped with shredded reduced-fat mild cheddar cheese.

Two-Cheese Fettuccine Primavera, at just over 400 calories a serving, includes a creamy white sauce that is made with skim milk instead of cream. It features fettuccine, sautéed onions and garlic, and a delicate blend of spices, all tossed in the skim milk "creamy" sauce and combined with shredded low-moisture part-skim mozzarella cheese. Grated Parmesan cheese, Broccoli and red pepper are mixed with the pasta for added taste and color.

Mexican Cheddar Bean Salad, at 420 calories a serving, features a popular protein-packed, three-bean combination, chicken or turkey, added spice from red pepper, salsa and onions, all combined with cubes of reduced-fat sharp Cheddar cheese. The salad can be prepared in 15 minutes and left to chill until you are ready to serve it.



Cheese-Topped Skillet Chicken and Rice (clockwise from top), Mexican Cheddar Bean Salad and Two-Cheese Fettuccine Primavera are perfect for cooks-on-the-go.

CHEESE-TOPPED SKILLET CHICKEN AND RICE

1 cup chopped onion
1 garlic clove, minced
1 tablespoon oil
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 (1 1/2-ounce) can tomatoes, undrained, cut up
1 cup rice
1/2 cup cold water
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon cumin
1/2 teaspoon black pepper sauce and salt (optional)
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded reduced-fat mild Cheddar cheese
2 tablespoons green onion slices

• Sauté onions and garlic in oil in 10-inch skillet. Stir in chicken, tomatoes, rice, water and seasonings.

• Bring to boil. Cover; reduce heat. Simmer 20-25 minutes or until rice is tender and most of liquid is absorbed.

• Sprinkle with cheese and green onion. Cover 1 to 2 minutes or until cheese is melted. 4 servings.

Prep time: 10 minutes; Cooking time: 30 minutes

Nutrition information per serving: Calories, 440; Protein, 22; Carbohydrate, 55; Fat, 10; Cholesterol, 15; Sodium, 450; Calcium, 509

TWO-CHEESE FETTUCCINE PRIMAVERA

1 medium onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon flour
1 teaspoon dried basil leaves
1/2 teaspoon each: dried oregano leaves and coarse ground pepper
1 1/2 cups skim milk
8 ounces fettuccine, cooked, drained
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded low-moisture part-skim mozzarella cheese
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
2 cups broccoli flowerets, cooked, drained
1 red pepper, cut into julienne strips

• Sauté onions and garlic in oil in medium saucepan.

• Blend in flour and seasonings. Gradually add milk; cook, stirring constantly, until thickened.

• Toss hot pasta with sauce and remaining ingredients. Serve immediately. 4 servings.

Prep time: 20 minutes; Cooking time: 10 minutes.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories, 400; Protein, 22; Carbohydrate, 55; Fat, 10; Cholesterol, 15; Sodium, 450; Calcium, 509

MEXICALI CHEDDAR BEAN SALAD

One (16-ounce) can each: black beans, kidney beans and navy or great northern beans, rinsed, drained
2 cups chopped cooked chicken or turkey
1 1/2 cups (6 ounces) cubed reduced-fat sharp cheddar cheese
1 small red pepper, chopped
1/2 cup chunky salsa
1/2 cup green onion slices
1/2 cup cilantro (optional)
1 tablespoon lime juice
Lettuce leaves

• Toss together all ingredients except lettuce until well coated; chill. Serve on lettuce-lined plates. 6 servings.

Prep time: 15 minutes, plus chilling.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories, 420; Protein, 37; Carbohydrate, 48; Fat, 12; Cholesterol, 75; Sodium, 500; Calcium, 311

Singing praises of Southern grits

"Corn Grits, Fritters, Pumpkin Grits, Savory Grits Pie, Spring Chicken and Grits, Blueberry Grits Muffins, and Grits Pizza — 'Grits aren't just for breakfast anymore,'" says Craig Claiborne.

Craig Claiborne printed his signature recipe for Shrimp and Grits in the New York Times in 1985. The author of "Bill Neal's Southern Cooking and Biscuits, Spoonbread, and Sweet Potato Pie," he is a consultant and former chef at Crook's Corner, a restaurant in Chapel Hill, N.C.

A lecturer on early American cookery, Neal recently provided the introduction to "The Kentucky Housewife" by Lettice Bryan (University of South Carolina Press, 1990). His articles appear in Esquire, Gourmet and the New York Times.

Perry is an editor at the University of North Carolina Press and is an absolute fanatic about grits.

SHRIMP AND GRITS

1 pound medium-sized fresh shrimp, peeled (and deveined, if desired)
6 slices bacon
Peanut oil
2 cups sliced fresh white mushrooms
1 cup sliced scallions (green onions)
1 large clove garlic, crushed through a garlic press
4 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
Dash of Tabasco sauce
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

They welcome ingredients from other cultures (Jalapeno Grits, Grits Pizza), add a new dimension to vegetables, and are the centerpiece of a company dinner (Quail on Little Grits Cakes, Shrimp and Grits, Louisiana Meatballs).

As the authors note, many people believe grits were America's first food. The Indians offered grits to the settlers, who immediately adopted both the food and its source, corn, as their own. As the country expanded, wheat replaced corn as the grain of choice for human consumption, but corn — and grits — remained dominant in the South.

"WE BEGAN THIS book with a few questions," says Neal. "Where do grits come from and why do Southerners eat them?" The answers, says Perry, are like grits themselves, both simple and complex. "Most of all," he says, "they are fun to eat and fun to cook."

Check full of grits lore and grits sources, "The Good Old Grits Cookbook" also is available in a burlap gift sack version (\$8.95).

Neal first achieved fame north of the Mason-Dixon line when

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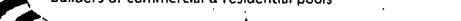
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