

Fast and healthy summer meal tips

Written by (StatePoint)
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When the hot weather hits you want to put colorful, healthful meals on your family's table without breaking a sweat.

Preparing meals quickly can help you keep the temperature down in your kitchen during the summer. And adding fresh seasonal vegetables and fruits to low-fat meals is a great way to get the nutrients you need to take advantage of the warm weather while staying trim in your swimsuit.

Here are a few tips for healthier seasonal meals, from the experts behind an innovative new cookbook, "The Special K Challenge & Beyond" cookbook, which features more than 100 recipes, as well as expert fitness and nutrition tips:

- * Mix up ingredients. Try new fruits and vegetables, grains and seafood you haven't tried before. Or, bring excitement to meals by combining taste sensations. For example, mix sweet (fresh or dried fruit); salty (capers, olives, anchovies or Parmesan cheese); bitter (dark greens like arugula, escarole or kale); and sour (citrus, grapes, vinegar, yogurt) in complementary portions.

- * Build flavor instead of calories. Use mild fresh herbs, such as parsley, basil, chives, chervil or tarragon.

- * Instead of whole milk cheeses, switch to reduced or nonfat versions of your favorite mozzarella, pepper jack or ricotta cheeses.

- * Instead of rice as a side dish, try whole grains like quinoa, bulgur wheat. Or swap white rice for brown rice.

More tips and recipes can be found online at www.specialk.com and in "The Special K

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Challenge & Beyond" cookbook.

To get started, here's an easy recipe from the new cookbook that relies on the salty, tangy and spicy flavors of Thai cooking:

Thai-Style Chicken in Lettuce Cups

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons orange juice
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon unseasoned rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
- 8 ounces ground chicken breast
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups thinly sliced bok choy
- 1 1/2 cups cooked brown rice
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped carrot
- 1/2 cup sliced green onions
- 1/3 cup chopped water chestnuts, drained
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 12 medium Bibb or Boston lettuce leaves

In small food processor, work bowl or blender container combine orange juice, peanut butter, soy sauce, vinegar and ginger. Mix until nearly smooth. Set aside.

In a large nonstick skillet cook chicken and garlic over medium-high heat, breaking up chicken with a wooden spoon, for 3 to 5 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink. Drain off fat. Stir in bok choy, rice, carrot, green onions, water chestnuts and red pepper. Stir in orange juice mixture. Reduce heat to medium. Cover and cook for 2 minutes.

Place lettuce on serving platter. Spoon chicken into lettuce leaves. Wrap leaves around chicken, securing with wooden picks.

Serves 4; Calories per serving: 230; Fat: 6g