

Chapter 40

Stir-Fries & Casseroles

Combining Foods for Health

Directions: Read the following selection. Then answer the questions under *Thinking Critically*, and complete the activities as directed by your teacher.

Combination dishes, such as stir-fries and casseroles, offer opportunities to create new tastes. They can be very nutritious, providing servings from several food groups. However, combination dishes can also provide hiding places for nutrients that many people want to limit, such as fat and sodium. Only the cook may know exactly what ingredients went into the dish and how much of each. For the sake of your family, guests, and others who may eat your combination dishes, give some thought to ingredients people may prefer to avoid.

Many people desire to limit their fat intake. Therefore, you may wish to think about ways you can minimize the fat content of your recipes.

When looking over the recipe for a combination dish, try to find ways you can use some of the following fat-reducing strategies:

- ◆ Build a dish around vegetables. Choose sturdy vegetables that can stand up to longer cooking times. Potatoes, corn, cauliflower, and carrots are popular choices, but you might experiment with turnips, rutabagas, and butternut squash as well.
- ◆ If you use meat, cut it into small pieces, and brown it first in a nonstick skillet. Browning enhances the flavor. Also, using small pieces allows people to experience the same great taste but in smaller portions.
- ◆ If a recipe calls for browned, ground meat, drain off the fat, or microwave the meat and drain it.
- ◆ Reduce or omit any added fats by replacing them, all or in part, with broth or juice. You may want to increase the liquid when making a cream sauce. Also, slow cooking will “stretch” the fat and the flavor.
- ◆ Replace cream with evaporated skim milk. Regular skim milk is too thin for many casseroles and can make your recipe runny. Low-fat cottage cheese, blended in a food processor, is another healthful cream substitute.

- ◆ If a chicken or roast is the centerpiece of your one-pot meal, try pouring off the drippings about half an hour before the meat is done cooking. Then put the drippings in a plastic container, and store in the freezer. By the time the meat is cooked, the fat in the drippings should be easy to remove. You can then use the drippings to prepare a reduced-fat gravy.

Sodium is another item many people try to restrict or avoid. When you combine and season foods, it is best to salt lightly or omit salt. Doing so allows each diner to add salt to taste.

Some people cannot tolerate very spicy foods. If you are making a dish, such as curry or enchiladas, consider using only small amounts of hot spices or chilies. Provide a hotter sauce for people to add if they choose.

Looking for healthful alternatives to traditional combination dishes can motivate you to create new ones. Use the ideas that follow as a starting point.

- ◆ Line a baking dish with thin potato slices. Cover with a mixture of cooked beans or lentils and peas, and top with lightly buttered bread crumbs.
- ◆ Lightly sauté tomato chunks in a nonstick skillet, and add chickpeas. Toss with cooked spaghetti and grated sharp cheese in a baking dish and heat through.
- ◆ For a Mediterranean twist, mix tomatoes, potatoes, olives, and mushrooms. Add chicken broth to moisten.
- ◆ Combine cooked pasta, mixed vegetables, and fat-free cottage cheese; top with grated cheese and bread crumbs.
- ◆ Make tricolor potato lasagna. Layer sliced potatoes, spinach, low-fat ricotta cheese, and fresh tomato sauce.
- ◆ When you read a recipe, think about ways to make the dish a more healthful food choice. You will enjoy taking advantage of the opportunities combination dishes offer.

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Thinking Critically

1. A recent survey indicates that for many Americans, their favorite meals are those that can be prepared ready-to-eat in 30 minutes. How can combination foods, such as stir-fries and casseroles, meet these criteria? How can you modify your favorite casserole or stir-fry recipe to meet the 30-minute criteria? If necessary, use additional paper to complete your answer and attach it to this activity.

2. Would you consider stir-fries to have less fat than casseroles? Why or why not?

3. If condensed soup or broth is used in a casserole, what recommendations would you make to reduce fat or sodium in the recipe?

For Further Study

- ◆ Use Internet or print resources to search for combination food recipes that are low in fat and sodium. Make a list of the most frequently used ingredients. What conclusions can you make? Select a recipe to prepare at home or in the foods lab. Evaluate the recipe for preparation time and nutritive values. Write a brief summary and submit it to your teacher.
- ◆ Find a recipe for stir-fry. Evaluate this recipe by comparing it with the MyPyramid food group recommendations. What substitutions, if any, would make this recipe more healthful? Why?
- ◆ Search cookbooks designed for restricted diets, such as low-sodium, low-fat, low-sugar, or dairy-free diets. Find examples of stir-fries or casseroles that fit into the restricted eating plan. Describe how the recipe is modified to fit the eating plan. Then choose a regular recipe, and rewrite it, making similar changes. Prepare your new recipe at home or in the foods lab. Evaluate the recipe for preparation time, nutritive value, and taste. Share your experience with the class.