

NOW SERVING



Mushroom beef burger [Courtesy of medinsteadofmeds.com]

Picnics and cookouts are a summer staple, but that doesn't mean they can't change for the better.

By PETE M. ANDERSON

Burgers and hot dogs. Fried chicken. Bowls of potato, macaroni and other salads. Tangy baked beans. Picnics and cookouts always have served many favorite foods.

While it all tastes great, it's not always the best for your health. Meals have changed as more people battle chronic ailments, such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. And those served on warm summer days under blue skies are no exception.

To help with that change, N.C. State University and N.C. Division of Public Health nutrition and health professionals

collaborated on Med Instead of Meds. Linda Minges, a N.C. Cooperative Extension agent in Gaston County who specializes in nutrition and food safety, said it's based on a Mediterranean diet, which encourages whole fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and healthy cereals and discourages red meats and processed foods.

Studies have shown that people who eat more of those use fewer blood-pressure, high-cholesterol and diabetes medications. Minges said eating more fruits and vegetables increases the antioxidants you ingest. They are believed to prevent disease. Changes don't have to be wholesale. Even altering some of your eating

Food safety is important, no matter the menu, Page 38

habits can make a difference.

"This is about small changes that you can make for your whole family," she said.

Recipes are a big part of the program. The cucumber and apple slaw, for example, is simple to make and one of Minges' favorites. The recipe for taco meat replaces some beef with mushrooms. Using ground turkey instead of beef makes it even healthier, she said. You'll find these and more recipes for salads, entrées, desserts and other dishes on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

TRY THESE RECIPES

Here are five recipes filled with good-for-you ingredients that will fit in at any picnic or cookout.

Find more at medinsteadofmeds.com.

Mushroom beef burgers

A Mediterranean diet uses little red meat. This recipe introduces mushrooms (a 1 to 1 ratio to meat) for a flavorful but lighter burger.

Serves 8

Serving: 1 patty

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooling Time: 1 hour 20 minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour 45 minutes

Ingredients

- 2 pounds (approximately 10 cups) mushrooms — white, shiitake, crimini or a combination
- 2 pounds lean ground beef
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 egg whites

Directions

Chop the mushrooms into small pieces. This can be done in a food processor. You want them small but not a paste. Cook the mushrooms in a skillet or wok over medium-high heat until no more moisture remains, approximately 6 minutes. Cool the mushrooms for 30 minutes off the heat. You can put them in the refrigerator for 15 minutes. Combine the remaining ingredients in a large bowl, and then add the mushrooms. Form into eight patties. Refrigerate for at least an hour to overnight. Cook the burgers in a skillet with vegetable oil over medium-high heat, or grill them over medium-high heat, approximately 5 to 6 minutes on each side. Cook to an internal temperature of at least 160 degrees.

Nutrition information per serving

Serving: 1 patty

Vegetables: 1¼ cups

Fruits: 0 cups

Calories: 143 calories

Carbohydrates: 4 grams

Fiber: 1 gram

Protein: 18 grams

Fat: 6 grams

Sodium: 538 mg



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Apple cucumber slaw [Courtesy of medinsteadofmeds.com]

Apple cucumber slaw

This recipe goes well with salmon burgers or as a bed for fish or chicken.

Serves 2

Serving: 1 cup

Prep time: 15 minutes

Total time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 Red Delicious or Granny Smith apple, cut into matchsticks
- Half of an English cucumber, chopped
- One-quarter of a sweet onion, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped fine
- ¼ cup white wine vinegar or rice wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Serve immediately, or chill in refrigerator until serving.

Nutrition information per serving (based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper)

Serving: 1 cup

Vegetables: ½ cup

Fruits: ½ cup

Calories: 58 calories

Carbohydrates: 12 grams

Fiber: 2 grams

Protein: 0 grams

Fat: 0 grams

Sodium: 308 mg

Summer green bean salad

Serves 6

Serving: 1½ cups

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Cool time: 15-30 minutes

Total time: 40-55 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 pound (approximately 3 cups) green beans, washed and trimmed
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- 2 ears corn, cooked and cut off the cob
- 4 ounces (approximately ½ cup) ricotta salata or feta, shredded finely or crumbled
- 3 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup packed basil leaves, cut into thin ribbons
- Salt to taste

Directions

Cook the green beans in salted water until just done. Do not overcook. Chill well, approximately 15 to 30 minutes. In a large bowl, combine the cherry tomatoes, corn and green beans. Add cheese to the vegetable mixture. Make the vinaigrette by combining the vinegar and mustard, then add the oil in a thin stream while beating. Add the dressing to the vegetable mixture. Top with the basil. Salt to taste.



Summer green bean salad [Courtesy of medinsteadofmeds.com]

Nutritional information per serving (based on ½ teaspoon salt)

Serving: 1½ cups

Vegetables: 1¼ cups

Fruits: 0 cups

Calories: 169 calories

Carbohydrates: 14 grams

Fiber: 3 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Fat: 11 grams

Sodium: 41 mg

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Salmon burgers

These burgers are super easy and can be made quickly. Have your fishmonger remove the skin from the salmon to make it even easier. Service it on a bun with Sriracha mayonnaise or bed of kale slaw.

Serves 4

Serving: 1 burger

Prep time: 15 minutes

Chill time (Optional): 1 hour

Cook time: 10 minutes

Total time: 25 minutes or 1 hour • 25 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 pound of salmon, skin and bones removed
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger (more if you really like ginger)
- ½ tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- ½ tablespoon Sriracha or other hot sauce, adding more or less to meet your heat preference
- 2 to 4 tablespoons chopped green onions
- A few grinds of fresh black pepper
- 1 egg
- ½ cup whole-wheat panko bread crumbs
- Grapeseed, canola or other vegetable oil for cooking the burgers



Salmon burger [Courtesy of medinsteadofmeds.com]

Directions

Process salmon, ginger, soy sauce, Sriracha, green onions and pepper in a food processor until well blended. Place the salmon mixture in a bowl. Stir in the egg and panko. Make four patties from the mixture. Refrigerate for an hour or so (optional). Lightly oil a non-stick skillet. Cook on medium heat for 5 minutes. Flip and cook the other side. Test internal temperature to 145 to 150 degrees.

Nutrition information per serving

Serving: 1 burger

Vegetables: 0 cups

Fruits: 0 cups

Calories: 239 calories

Carbohydrates: 11 grams

Fiber: 1 gram

Protein: 28 grams

Fat: 8 grams

Sodium: 328 mg

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medinsteadofmeds.com, which also has articles, webinars, how-to videos and a schedule of classes held across the state.

While each ingredient and preparation method create different flavors and textures in a finished dish, Minges said most people will find those in a Mediterranean diet familiar.

She said the biggest difference most people have found comes from the added grains. Quinoa and couscous, for example, are new experience for many.

Food safety is still important. No matter what you serve, you need to take precautions so it's safe to eat. Minges said that's especially true if you're feeding the oldest and youngest family members and friends, whose compromised or undeveloped immune system, or chronic health condition, puts them at more of a risk.

While safe handling raw meat always has been one concern, recent outbreaks, such as E. coli in lettuce, have added more. Minges said the best prevention is to keep foods out of their danger zones, whether that's too warm or too cold. One traditional concern — mayonnaise — isn't actually much of a problem, if it's commercially made.

"It's not as much an issue as more perishable items," she said.

Planning goes a long way toward serving safe food at your picnic or cookout.

That starts with remembering a food thermometer to check grilled meats for doneness and locating a place to wash your hands and utensils.

"Sanitizers are a help, but handwashing is always the best," Minges said.

And don't forget about the cooler. Minges warned against storing it in direct sunlight or a closed car, where its efficiency decreases as the ambient temperature increases. Also, make sure you drain water from melted ice and add fresh ice. Don't cancel your plans if maintaining a cooler isn't your idea of a good time, Minges said. Change the menu to nonperishable foods. Choose from fruits, vegetables, hard cheese, canned or dried meats, dry cereal, bread, peanut butter and crackers, which all don't require refrigeration, according to foodsafety.gov.



Banana granita with blueberries
[Courtesy of medinsteadofmeds.com]

Banana granita with blueberries

This simple and refreshing dessert is similar to ice cream. It can be topped with any fresh or frozen fruit or a sprinkling of nuts or seeds. This is a great way to extend the life of bananas that are reaching their prime and satisfy your sweet tooth.

Serves 4

Serving size: ½ cup

Prep time: 10 minutes

Total time: 10 minutes

Ingredients

- 4 medium bananas, peeled, quartered and frozen
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 20 blueberries, frozen

Directions

Remove bananas from freezer and defrost at room temperature for 2 to 5 minutes. Put bananas and honey in a food processor or blender. Process or blend until smooth. Evenly divide frozen banana blend into four bowls and top with frozen blueberries.

Nutrition information per serving

Serving: ½ cup

Vegetables: 0 cups

Fruits: 1 cup

Calories: 126 calories

Carbohydrates: 32 grams

Fiber: 4 grams

Protein: 1 gram

Fat: 1 gram

Food safety is important, no matter the menu

No one plans to invite salmonella, listeria and other sickness-inducing bacteria to their picnic or cookout. Follow these 15 tips from foodsafety.gov to ensure they don't arrive uninvited.

- Wash hands, work space and utensils before, during and after food preparation.
- Marinate food in the refrigerator.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator.
- Pack only as much food as you'll eat to avoid dealing with leftovers.
- Minimize time that food is stored on ice or frozen gel packs in a cooler.
- Creamy or custard foods and salads using store-bought mayonnaise are safe, if kept in a cold cooler.
- Don't par- or pre-cook food. Plan to cook completely at the picnic site.
- Pack cold food first, right from the refrigerator.
- Keep hot foods hot with a thermos or insulated dish.
- Keep raw food cold until cooking.
- Beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, roasts and chops should be cooked to 145 degrees and allowed to rest for three minutes. Cook ground versions to 160 degrees. Cook whole poultry, poultry breasts and ground poultry to 165 degrees.
- Use a clean plate for serving cooked food.
- Don't let raw meat juices touch other food.
- When the air temperature is 90 degrees or warmer, don't let food sit out for longer than an hour.
- Remember paper towels and a food thermometer.