

Sweet Spot Cooking 101

December week 1

Every meal you make doesn't have to have meat or fish. Meat is the most expensive protein source and it contains fat. Dried beans and some grains contain protein without fat. Try having a meatless meal once a week or more often. Use beans, legumes, cheese, eggs or soy products. Veggie burgers made with black beans are good and you can find them in most grocery stores. Experiment with different products and see what you like best. Try having a potluck with some of your friends and have each one bring a non-meat source of protein for tasting.

Whole grains are the best for eating healthy. You will feel full longer and avoid cravings that refined and processed foods can trigger. Avoid anything "white". Choose brown rice, whole grain pasta, barley, quinoa and oats. Whole grain crackers and breads are available at most grocery stores. Many other whole grain products are easy to find at larger chain stores.

Cooking healthy means preparing and eating a variety of colors each day. Think of the rainbow and then pick foods of several different colors each day. Fruits and vegetables come in all colors. Red, yellow and orange foods like carrots and peppers have beta-carotene. The purple and blues from berries, beets and eggplant are high in antioxidants. The green group is probably the hardest for most people to get every day. Kale, spinach, cabbage, broccoli and darker green lettuces are good choices. Be creative! Use spaghetti squash instead of pasta to get a yellow choice. Dried fruits can replace sweet candy or pastries (watch the portion size). Baked kale chips, made at home or packaged, are a way to get something green on your plate.

Herbs and spices are one of the best ways to keep your food healthy and tasty. You can put an international spin on almost any meat or vegetable. Each culture has certain flavors that are its trademark. Mexican cuisine has cilantro and chili peppers. Italian brings to mind basil and oregano with garlic. French cuisine has rosemary and thyme. Oriental cooks use Chinese 5 spice. Indian meals are often made with curry. The list is endless. Try something new each week. You can find cards with small amounts of spices and recipes on the spice aisle of the grocery store. You can also buy larger quantities and have a spice swap with your friends or family.