Cooking Tips to Make Great Tasting Food

If you are not eating much fruit, veggies, lean proteins and whole grains, is it because you do not like the taste? It could be that your taste buds are simply accustomed to the taste of foods processed with a lot of salt, fat and/or sugar or you just don’t know how too make them more flavorful. People may think that “healthy” eating is the same as “plain” eating so your meals consist of plain broiled chicken or plain steamed veggies without seasoning. But healthy foods properly prepared can be delicious!

If you can, start with the best possible ingredients. When foods are fresh they are usually at their peak of quality and flavor. Then learn how to cook and season them. Do not be afraid to experiment with cooking techniques and flavorings. Even if you are getting prepared meals delivered to your home you can certainly add seasonings (not too much salt!) to enhance the flavors of the foods delivered.

How to Make Great Tasting Veggies

Buy in season as much as possible or purchase frozen vegetables. Small or “baby” veggies such as baby spinach or kale often have a milder flavor and are more tender than larger more mature varieties.

Cook most veggies just until tender-crisp to preserve taste, texture and color. So you can easily bite them—but they still have some ‘snap’ to them.

Season with garlic, onion, citrus juices, vinegar, herbs, spices, or soy sauce can add flavor without the calories. Try some ‘classic’ flavors like basil with tomato, ginger with carrots, and garlic with leafy greens. Sometimes a little sweet flavor can take away the bitter bite. Dress kale salad with a little vinaigrette and add something sweet, like diced mango, apple or fresh oranges, or a few raisins or dried cranberries, or honey to make it tastier.

Sprinkle with nuts (like walnuts, pistachios, or pecans), seeds (like sesame or sunflower), or a little shaved parmesan cheese.

Sauté in broth, wine or a little flavorful oil (like olive, sesame or walnut).

Roast to mellow and concentrate the flavor. Toss cut veggies (like broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, Brussel sprouts, green beans, beets, kale or carrots) with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Then roast in a single layer on a cookie sheet at 425 degrees for about 20 minutes until tender and they begin to caramelize. Caramelizing foods involves a slow cooking process and deep browning (when sugar reacts in the presence of high heat). Those veggies and fruits higher in sugar are better for this such as onions, leeks and carrots, as well as fruits like apples and bananas.
Mix several veggies together to make them more appealing to the eye and your taste buds.

Blanch then stir-fry or chill. Blanching is especially good for strong-tasting veggies like broccoli and cauliflower. It helps take away some of the very strong flavors. Put cut veggies in boiling water (some salt is optional) for 45-60 seconds. Drain, then stir-fry in a little oil with garlic and a drizzle of soy sauce or just chill and add to salads or use for dipping.

Massage strong-tasting greens like kale or cabbage before eating them raw. Finely slice the greens, then massage under a spray of warm water for a minute or two. This softens the texture and removes some of the ‘raw’ taste. Rinse with cold water to refresh, then dry thoroughly and put some vinaigrette or other dressing on them. A better way to make cole slaw?

Sweeten your veggies to contrast with the strong taste. Slice a fresh apple, pear or orange into your green salad, or a few raisins to a broccoli stir-fry.

How to Make Tofu, Fish, Meat, and Poultry Taste Great

Marinating these foods before cooking can boosts flavor and help keep them moist and tender. Acidic foods help to tenderize, so include some citrus juice, vinegar, or yogurt in your marinade.

Rubs are mixtures of seasonings—usually salt, pepper, herbs and spices—that are liberally rubbed into the surface of your foods (dry rub), or mixed into a paste with a little prepared mustard, oil, mashed garlic or yogurt (wet rub). You can make your own or use a commercial seasoning mix (and there are many with little or no added salt too). After applying the rub, place the food in the refrigerator and let the rub penetrate for at least 30 minutes or up to several hours before cooking.

Poaching fish and poultry in a flavorful liquid can make them more moist and tasty, rather than baking it dry. Use vegetable, mushroom, fish or chicken stock and add sliced lemon, onion, garlic, fresh herbs and/or peppercorns to the liquid.

Top with a squeeze of lemon juice and lots of parsley, a drizzle of olive oil or a few dashes of soy sauce. Or, top with salsa (tomato or fruit), tomato sauce, sautéed mushrooms or onions, or sliced avocado.

References: http://discovergoodnutrition.com/2015/06/healthy-foods-taste-great/
How to Make Whole Grains Taste Great (like brown rice, quinoa, bulgur, and barley)

Sauté in a little oil over medium heat. Most whole grains have a naturally nutty flavor and sautéing to toast a little bit brings out the delicious taste.

Season with spices, especially when cooking or sautéing, to release more flavor from the spices. Try ground cumin, curry powder, cinnamon, ginger or dried orange peel to name a few.

Add veggies and herbs. Cooking veggies with grains helps add to your veggie intake and it adds flavor and color to your dish. As you sauté your grains, add onion, garlic, chopped broccoli, grated carrot, diced pepper, chopped tomato, or some herbs like parsley, thyme, oregano or basil.

Cover or cook with a flavorful liquid instead of water such as a lower sodium or homemade chicken, vegetable or mushroom stock, or diluted lower sodium tomato juice.

How to Make Fruits Taste Great

Buy in season as much as possible or get frozen unsweetened fruits like berries and peaches.

Sprinkle with sweet spices (like cinnamon, clove or nutmeg), citrus juice or a few drops of balsamic vinegar.

Blend fruits, fresh or frozen, into shakes or smoothies to add delicious flavor and texture.

Mix different fruits into a fruit salad or green salad. It will bring out more flavor and look more colorful.

Dip cut fruits into mixtures of yogurt (plain nonfat yogurt sweetened with a little maple syrup) or some peanut butter (apples, bananas make great PB and fruit sandwiches!).

Try these sauces

Lime-Dill Sauce: 1 Tablespoon lime juice, 1 Tablespoon brown sugar or honey, ½ Tsp. dried dill weed and salt and pepper to taste. Mix ingredients together in a small bowl. Great on steamed carrots.

Lemon-Garlic-Mustard Sauce: 1 Tablespoon lemon juice, 1 Teaspoon Dijon mustard, 1 Tablespoon olive oil, 1 clove garlic, minced, ½ tsp. sugar or honey, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix dressing ingredients together. Drizzle on steamed green beans.
Stove Top Casserole  
Makes 5 servings

Ingredients:
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil;
- 1 onion (small, coarsely chopped);
- 4 potatoes (medium, peeled and sliced 1/4 inch thick);
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock; 2 cups green cabbage (shredded);
- 1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded;
- 1/4 cup nuts (chopped).

Directions: 1. Heat oil in large skillet or Dutch oven. Add onions and stir over medium heat until golden. 2. Add potatoes and chicken stock. Cover tightly, reduce heat to low and simmer until potatoes are almost tender. 3. Add cabbage, cover and simmer for another 5 minutes. 4. Remove cover, sprinkle with cheese and nuts. 5. Let stand just until cheese is melted, about 2 minutes.

Source: Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service, Oregon’s Healthy Harvest Recipes

Potato Beef Casserole  
Makes 5 Servings

Ingredients:
- 1 onion (diced);
- 1/2 pound ground beef (85% lean);
- 5 potatoes (or 1 16oz package frozen hash browns);
- 1 can mushroom soup (10 ounces);
- 5 ounces water.

Directions: 1. Peel onion and dice into 1/4-inch pieces. 2. Cook ground beef and onions in a skillet until the meat is browned. Drain of fat. 3. Add mushroom soup and 1/2 can water. 4. Use a brush to scrub potatoes under cold running water. Slice potatoes into 1/2-inch thick pieces and place in the bottom of a casserole dish. 5. Spread meat and soup mixture over potatoes. 6. Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes until potatoes are tender and casserole is bubbly and browned.

Source: ONIE Project - Oklahoma Nutrition Information and Education

Tuna-Noodle Casserole  
Makes 4 servings

Ingredients:
- 2 (5 ounce) cans tuna, drained;
- 1 cup macaroni, uncooked;
- 1 small onion, chopped;
- 1 (14 ounce) canned peas, drained or 8oz (1 cup) frozen peas;
- 1 (10 1/2 ounce) can cream of mushroom soup;
- 1 cup low fat milk;
- 6 tablespoons (about 3 ounces) low-fat cheddar cheese; and pepper to taste.

Directions: 1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. 2. Spray 8x8 pan with non stick spray. 3. In a bowl, mix tuna, noodles, onion, peas, soup and milk. 4. Pour into pan. Make sure noodles are covered by sauce. 5. Sprinkle with cheese. 6. Cover and bake for 1 hour.

Source: http://www.food.com/recipe/easy-tuna-noodle-casserole-low-fat

Have a nutritional question or concern regarding your food and/or supplement choices? If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for the dietitian to call you back.