

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference

Grilling for Heart Health:

Tips for a Healthy Barbecue Season

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Gathering with friends and family for a warm weather meal should be a joyous occasion. With summer around the corner, it's time to fire up the grill and enjoy delicious meals while prioritizing your heart health. Traditional barbecue meals often lean towards indulgent, high-fat options that may not align with your heart health goals. However, with a few simple tips and mindful choices, your summertime meal can become heart-healthy in no time.

Here are some simple tips for a heart healthy meal this barbecue season:

- **Create Your Plate:** Creating a healthy meal this barbecue season starts with portion control. Try filling one-fourth of your plate with lean protein, one-fourth of the plate with a whole grain, and the rest, or one-half of the plate, with fruit and vegetables.
- **Choose Lean Proteins:** Choose lean protein sources when planning your meal. Often barbecue options are high in saturated fat. Lower saturated fat options include skinless chicken, fish such as salmon or tuna steaks, turkey patties, and lean cuts of beef or pork. For those seeking plant-based options, tofu and bean-based burgers are great alternatives.
- **Add Some Color:** Adding vegetables to your summer meal can increase both visual appeal and nutritional benefits. Grilling vegetables such as asparagus, bell peppers, eggplant, corn on the cob, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, squash, and zucchini can provide nutrients including potassium, dietary fiber, folate, Vitamin A and Vitamin C which are vital for the health of your body.
- **Pair with Whole Grain:** Swap out traditional white buns for whole grain options, such as buns and bread, when serving burgers and hot dogs. Whole grains can provide extra fiber to your barbecue meal which can help lower cholesterol levels and even reduce the risk of heart disease. For an even lighter alternative, use romaine lettuce as a wrap option.
- **Mindful Marinades & Sauces:** Choosing marinades and sauces lower in sodium and free of added sugars helps create a healthy barbecue. You can even make your own heart-healthy marinade by using ingredients like olive oil, vinegar, garlic, and fresh herbs. For a pound of grilled protein, use either one-half cup no-sodium marinade or one tablespoon salt-free spice rub.

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Are You Getting Enough Fiber?

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Did you know that over 90 percent of women and 97 percent of men are not meeting the recommended daily intake of dietary fiber?1 According to the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, it is recommended for women to consume around 25-28 grams of fiber per day and 31-34 grams per day for men. Fiber is a powerful nutrient, and promoting regular bowel movement is not its only benefit! Adequate fiber intake has been shown to help lower cholesterol levels, control blood sugar levels, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, two diseases that run rampant in the U.S.

Dietary fiber can be categorized into two categories: soluble fiber and insoluble fiber. Soluble fiber pulls water into the gastrointestinal track and slows down digestion. This type of fiber is found in beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds, and most fruits. Soluble fiber is the specific type of fiber that can help lower blood cholesterol levels. Soluble fiber binds to cholesterol in your system before it enters the blood stream, allowing it to exit the body.2 Insoluble fiber can speed up digestion by adding bulk to stool. Insoluble fiber is found in whole grains, wheat bran, and vegetables. This type of fiber can help to alleviate constipation. Consuming adequate amounts of both types of fiber will help to promote a healthy gastrointestinal tract and support digestion. Another benefit to adding fiber-rich foods to your meals and snacks is that these foods can help you feel satisfied and full for longer, which can aid in weight maintenance and reduce cravings.

Fiber supplements in the form of powders and pills are popular among consumers, but it should be noted that getting your daily fiber through the consumption of foods instead will provide you with the most benefit and should be your first step when increasing your fiber intake, unless told otherwise by a medical professional.

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Here are some easy tips to easily add fiber-rich foods to your daily intake:

1. **Swap out refined grains for whole grains**, such as replacing white toast with wheat toast, (Whole wheat seeded bread will add even more fiber!) or replacing white rice with brown rice.
2. **Include oatmeal** in your breakfast rotation (Add nut butters and/or seeds for an extra boost!)
3. **Try replacing regular pasta** with lentil or chickpea pasta.
4. **Add chia seeds or flax seeds** to your smoothies and sauces.
5. **Snack on fresh/frozen fruits and vegetables** throughout the day (Wash, cut, and store fresh fruits and vegetables at the beginning of the week to make it easier for you to grab them when you're feeling hungry and need a quick snack!)
6. **Make sure to ramp up fiber intake slowly** and stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water!

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Gut Microbiota -

Role in Human Health and Ways to Improve it

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Welcome to the world of the gut microbiome!! It is one of the top trending topics in healthcare, so, let's dig deeper into it. Our gut is home to trillions of various types of microbes including bacteria, fungi, viruses, and parasites also called gut microbiota. These microbes reside together, interact with each other, and help each other to maintain a balance in our gut ecosystem also called "gut microbiome." A healthy gut microbiome enhances human health.

Gut microbiotas can undertake a variety of metabolic functions such as production of short chain fatty acids (SCFAs) by digesting dietary fibers in the colon of the large intestine. These SCFAs supply energy and nutrients for us, as well as for microbial growth and proliferation.

For the gut microbiome to flourish, there needs to be a balance between the healthy species and the less healthy species. Imbalance in the gut microbiota leads to production of various metabolites of the less healthy species. These have been linked to altered gastrointestinal conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). These metabolites are also linked to a wide range of systemic diseases such as a weakened immune system, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. A balanced, diverse and healthy gut microbiome can help to boost your immune system so you stay healthy. Here are ways to build and sustain the diversity of your gut microbiome along with improving it.

Vegetables and fruits matter! These are loaded with dietary sources of prebiotics, or fibers which are food for your microbiota. MyPlate recommends half your plate be vegetables and fruits. Some examples of high fiber vegetables and fruits are leeks, onions, asparagus, broccoli, spinach, artichokes, mangoes, apples, and bananas. Other sources of dietary fibers are whole grains, cocoa extracts, nuts, seeds, red wine extracts, beans, lentils, chickpeas, and green tea extracts.



Reducing added sugars and limiting processed foods. Including a variety of foods ensures your microbiota is eating well. Some examples of food with prebiotic properties are raw honey, and dark chocolate with higher cocoa content (70% or higher). Studies show, 30g per day of 85% cocoa dark chocolate (equivalent of three thin squares of chocolate broken off from a bigger bar) may improve mood in association with gut microbial changes in healthy adults.

Probiotic supplements may benefit your gut. These are live bacteria that allow your gut microbiome to be populated by mostly the good types of microbes. Speak to your healthcare provider about choosing a probiotic that is right for you.

Fermented Foods are gut-friendly. They contain probiotics. Some examples are yogurt, kombucha, pickles, kimchee, and kefir.

Antibiotics cannot recognize good and bad gut bacteria. Ask your healthcare provider for the right strain of probiotic foods to be consumed with prescribed antibiotics. They will help to replenish your gut bacteria.

Stress can alter your microbiota and eventually your health. Some ways to reduce your stress might be exercising, meditation, mindfulness, yoga, or tai chi.

Quality sleep is an important part of your gut health. Getting sound sleep of at least 8 hours each night is very important.

Remember, your gut microbiota is influenced by your overall lifestyle. A healthy gut will keep you healthy mentally, physically, and emotionally. So, take good care of your gut microbiome and eat healthy!!

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- <https://www.myplate.gov/>

Keep Hydrated to Beat the Summer Heat

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As the summer season approaches and the temperatures rise, the risk of dehydration increases. Dehydration can happen at any time, but it is more common during the summer, when temperatures are higher, and we sweat more. Take small steps to learn about the signs and symptoms of dehydration, and easy tips to make staying hydrated easier.

What is Dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when your body loses more fluid than what you take in (dictionary.com). It can happen due to exercise, illness, low fluid intake, or high temperatures. Dehydration can occur at any age, especially in the summer, but babies and older adults are especially susceptible.



The body needs water to help it function smoothly. Research explains that children need 23 fluid ounces of water daily. Adults need at least 44 fluid ounces of water daily. Babies and young children are at increased risk for dehydration because their low body weight makes them more sensitive to even small amounts of fluid loss. As people age, they become more susceptible to dehydration due to diminished thirst response and shifts in body composition. After age 65, the body carries less bodily water compared to younger adults and children. Reduced kidney function can further impact the body's sodium and water balance and, ultimately, hydration status. Commonly prescribed medications can cause dehydration, too. This includes diuretics, laxatives, chemotherapy drugs, and blood pressure medications. Likewise, a medication that causes side effects like diarrhea, excessive sweating, or vomiting can impact hydration status.

Signs & Symptoms of Dehydration

Without enough fluid, the body will struggle to effectively cool itself down. The body needs fluids to work and act efficiently. Think of your body as a car, if you use all the gas in your car and do not stop at a gas station what will happen to your car? It will break down until you add the right fuel -- like gas to fill it up. Just like a car has a warning light to alert

you to potential problems, the body has a warning system, too. Dehydration can affect anyone, regardless of age, so it's important to understand the warning signs and symptoms.

Common Symptoms of Dehydration

In Children

- Dry mouth and tongue
- No tears when crying
- No wet diapers for at least three hours
- Sunken eyes and sunken cheeks
- Sunken soft spot on top of skull
- Listlessness
- Irritability

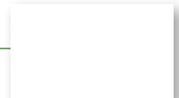
The Best Choices to Stay Hydrated

While the amount of water your body needs every day varies from person to person, there are estimates to guide you. The U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine calculated an adequate daily fluid intake as about 15.5 cups of fluids per day for men and about 11.5 cups of fluids per day for women. These recommendations cover fluids from water, other beverages, and food. About 20% of daily fluid intake usually comes from food and the rest from drinks. So, what's are the best choices to stay hydrated and give your body the fluid it needs to stay healthy?



Water: Choose water as the body's main source of hydration. Experts often recommend 8 glasses of water per day as a guideline. Ultimately, thirst is a strong indicator of your body's need for more fluids. While some people need fewer and others need more, 8 ounces appears to be a good guideline, but listen to your body.

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Other Foods & Beverages: While plain water is best for staying hydrated, other drinks and foods can help, too. “Reduced-fat milk naturally contains high concentrations of electrolytes, which can help balance the amount of water in the body.” Fruits and vegetables are also good sources of hydrating water. They also contain important vitamins and minerals. Some fruits and vegetables with the highest water content include cucumbers, iceberg lettuce, celery, radishes, romaine lettuce, tomatoes, zucchini and summer squash, asparagus, bell peppers, cabbage, spinach, strawberries, and watermelon.

Easy Tips to Stay Hydrated

The best way to beat the summer heat and stay hydrated is to use simple strategies to keep hydrating food and water readily available. Try these tips to get started:

- ✓ **Infuse fruit or vegetables into water.** Try cucumbers and mint, strawberries and watermelon, or use your favorite combination to create refreshing infused water.
- ✓ **Get a fancy water bottle.** Choose a water bottle that holds more water, so you don't have to refill as often.
- ✓ **Be a strategic water drinker.** Drink a glass before each meal, after you brush your teeth, or before you leave the office. Always rehydrate after exercise or outdoor summer activities.
- ✓ **Make achieving your daily water goal a challenge with your friends and families.**
- ✓ **Pack a bag or bowl with hydrating vegetables or fruit.** Cucumber slices, celery stalks, chopped berries, or watermelon chunks make a delicious, hydrating snack that's easy to take outside or to the office.



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Grilling for Heart Health:

Tips for a Healthy Barbecue Season

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- › **Hydration is Key:** Staying hydrated during your barbecue festivities is important. Consider sticking with water or unsweetened beverages. Drinking plenty of fluids low in sugar and alcohol keeps your body refreshed and energized.
- › **Fruit For Dessert:** Fruits can easily be put on the grill as a dessert. Create fruit kabobs using pineapple slices and peach halves to add a sweet touch to your barbecue menu. For extra flavor, lightly brush them with honey or sprinkle with cinnamon before grilling.

As you gear up for the barbecue season, remember that prioritizing your heart health doesn't mean sacrificing flavor and fun! By following these simple tips, you can savor delicious meals while nourishing your body. Happy Grilling!

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Small Steps to Boost Positivity and Productivity

Dr. Barbara O'Neill, *Distinguished Professor and Financial Management Specialist Emeritus, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*

one small positive thought in the morning can change your whole day

Success at work (e.g., earning a higher salary that can be invested to build wealth) and in life (e.g., being loved and/or respected by others) is often attributed to positivity (i.e., seeing a glass as “half full” instead of “half empty”) and productivity (i.e., what people accomplish alone or working with others).

Looking for ways to do more and feel better about your lifestyle at home, at work, and/or in retirement? Consider the following eight happiness and productivity hacks shared on a recent webinar by Utah State University professor, Dr. Dave Schramm.

◆ **Identify and Use Your Strengths-** Start by making a list of things that you are good at. This can include job-related skills (e.g., public speaking and technical writing), technology skills (e.g., computer maintenance and social media outreach), and social skills (e.g., raising children and mentoring co-workers). For additional insights, consider using tools such as the CliftonStrengths® assessment by Gallup and the VIA Survey of Character Strengths. Both will provide useful feedback to help you understand your best qualities.

◆ **Live True to Your Core Values-** Identify attributes of the person you want to be and what you would like people to say about you after you pass away. Examples include compassion, courage, determination, empathy, generosity, hard worker, honesty, humility, integrity, kindness, loyalty, and trustworthy. Various online value clarification activities such as this tool from Therapist Aid can help you prioritize your most important values.

◆ **Take Care of Your Health-** Healthy people are often happy people and unhealthy people, not so much. The “Big Three” areas of physical health to pay particular attention to on a daily basis are diet (eat more nutritious food and stop eating C.R.A.P.: Carbonated drinks, Refined sugars, Artificial foods, and Processed foods), physical activity (move more; at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week is recommended), and sleep (typically at least seven hours per night).



◆ **Find Flow-** Flow can be described as a joyful state that results from voluntarily doing something that is enjoyable, even mildly challenging, that you are totally absorbed in. When people are totally engrossed in an activity to the extent that they reach a flow state, they often lose track of time and report an intense and focused concentration on an activity and a sense of personal control that triggers feelings of happiness.

◆ **Gratitude-** Research studies have found that gratitude fosters an overall sense of happiness and well-being and helps people recover from loss or trauma. Some “go-to” gratitude hacks include writing down three good things that happen each day, making a “top 10” list of people, places, experiences, and things (that you are grateful for), and writing a letter (or making a visit) to thank someone for something that they did on your behalf.

◆ **RAKs-** Random acts of kindness (RAKs) are another happiness booster. A leading researcher in positive psychology noted “doing a kind act produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we tested.” RAKs can be simple: holding a door open for someone or buying a stranger a cup of coffee.

◆ **Smile Early and Often-** Workplace teams, community or professional associations, and neighborhoods work better with happy and friendly people and nothing conveys happiness better than a smile. The 10:5 rule for smiling is as follows: when you are within 10 feet of someone, smile and make eye contact. When you are within 5 feet of someone, greet them with a friendly hello or other welcoming greeting.

◆ **Focus on the Right Things-** Our time and attention are best spent on things in life that both really matter and that we can control. The best way to identify high priority activities is to draw a Venn Diagram with two overlapping circles: one that says “Things That Matter” and the other that says “Things I Can Control.” List items associated with each circle and then identify those in the overlap area. For example, people cannot control the direction of the stock market, but if financial security in later life matters a lot to them and they can control their spending, they can focus on freeing up money to make regular retirement plan savings deposits.



Food Allergies: Easy Overview for Caregivers and Pregnant Individuals

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Food allergies can affect anyone, at any given time in one's lifetime. However, certain populations are more vulnerable to developing food allergies, including pregnant individuals, infants, and children ages 3 – 5 years old. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about 5.8% of children between 0 – 17 years old are diagnosed with a food allergy. Exposure to a food allergen can lead to severe symptoms and potential anaphylactic shock, which is a serious and potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that can begin very rapidly.

This article will provide caregivers with important food allergy safety tips to improve risk-management practices.

What is a Food Allergy?

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease defines a food allergy as “the immune system reacting abnormally to a component of a food, sometimes producing a severe and life-threatening response known as anaphylaxis”. Although many types of foods can trigger a food allergy reaction, the 9 most common foods include milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and sesame.

Symptoms related to a food allergy reaction!

If your child has the following symptoms, you should consult with their healthcare provider to understand the reason, potential trigger foods, and treatment plan. Most trigger foods can be avoided by reading the Nutrition Facts Label on food products. Asking questions about the ingredients and cooking process of prepared foods can help identify potential triggers.

Symptoms of a food allergy reaction can include:

- Hives
- Flushed skin or rash
- Tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth
- Face, tongue, or lip swelling
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Coughing or wheezing
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Swelling of the throat and vocal cords
- Difficulty breathing
- Drop in blood pressure

Tips for Pregnant Individuals and Caregivers of Young Children

	There is no evidence that avoiding certain foods may reduce the occurrence of a food allergy. Consult with your healthcare provider about your options and options to consume a balanced diet throughout your pregnancy.
	Breastfeed the infant during the first 6 months of life if possible. Speak with your healthcare provider or lactation consultant if you notice any potential food allergy symptoms.
	Continue breastfeeding if possible until the infant reaches the age of two. When solid foods are introduced, instead of avoiding foods with potential allergies, these foods should be introduced early, during the first 4 – 6 months. Once new foods have been introduced, provide this food regularly to maintain tolerance.
	Children can start learning about their allergies and how to identify food items that can trigger an allergic reaction using the Nutrition Facts Label . Some milk, soy, and wheat allergies could dissipate by the age of three.

Visit these resources to learn more about food allergies.

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