

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

As the cold weather peeks, cravings for cool, fresh ingredients are long gone and those urges to eat ooey warm comfort goodness take over. Yes, we all love summer, and it will return! But for now, comfort food is where it's at. Everyone has one, that special dish that immediately makes you feel oh so good. They're called comfort food for a reason. They warm us from the inside out, they bring back fond memories, a sense of calm, tickle our taste buds, and soothe our soul. Sweet Oatmeal for breaky? Yes please. Creamy soup for lunch? Don't mind if I do. Mom's famous casserole for dinner? Sign me up! Delicious!! Unfortunately, most comfort foods are notorious diet derailleurs. These coveted dishes are usually buttery, creamy, cheesy or otherwise high cal, high fat, not to mention high sodium. (sigh) Here's the good news, cut some fat here and add additional nutrients there, and voila! You can turn these diet busters in to healthier dishes while keeping the traditional flavours intact.



It may be an old age myth, but according to mothers and grandmothers alike there really is no better cure for anything and everything that ails you than a warm bowl of homemade chicken noodle soup. The soup's steam helps relieve congestion and the warm broth coats a sore throat, but whether that comforting chicken noodle soup is healthy depends on the ingredients in the bowl. While they may be convenient, canned varieties of chicken noodle soup are often extremely high in sodium and low in protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. A typical 1/2-cup serving of condensed, canned chicken noodle soup can contain as much 890 milligrams of sodium. If you make your own soup with fresh ingredients, you can have a chicken noodle soup full of flavor and nutrients. Keep it classic with a mixture of homemade broth, sliced carrots, celery and onion, or add a little spin for the chicken win, and go for an Asian-inspired chicken noodle soup by using sliced bok choy and shiitake mushrooms. Instead of fatty chicken legs, reduce your fat intake significantly by preparing your soup using boneless, skinless chopped chicken breast, and boost the fiber content of your soup by using whole-wheat noodles in place

of white pasta or egg noodles. Combine a mixture of dried herbs and spices, such as oregano, garlic, parsley and even chili pepper flakes, to kick up the flavour without adding additional sodium. No matter what recipe you choose this classic will always succeed in soothing the soul while satisfying hunger.

If a heartier soup is your thing and protein builds muscle, then chili has all that and more. When it comes to making chili you really can't go wrong. You throw in your basic ingredients, chop up your veggies and let everything simmer until all the flavors have marinated and your chili is piping hot. Boom, EASY right? It's warm and cozy comfort when there's a blizzard outside. It's hearty perfection on game day. Leftovers are a quick, easy fix on busy weeknights. Best of all, with a few additional smart ingredients, it can also be an incredibly healthy one-pot wonder, packing in protein, produce, and fiber. Beyond the traditional tomato base, it's so easy to sneak extra vitamins into your chili through vegetables, shredded sweet potatoes, zucchini, eggplant, peppers and carrots add nutritional value without overpowering the other flavours. To make a classic beef chili that's still healthy, choose beef that is at least 90%-lean, or opt for lean and flavourful ground chicken or turkey breast instead.

Ladle up!

Homemade mac & cheese is a classic childhood fav, but when those craving hit as an adult you may as well throw in the towel. Creamy and hearty, it's truly one of the most loved comfort foods of all time. Unfortunately, all that cheesy goodness usually comes with a hefty side of calories and saturated fat, which makes it practically off limits when sticking to a healthy diet. It's time for a mac & cheese makeover. Homemade healthy mac and cheese is perfect for times when you don't want anything really far outside of the box. Like, literally, nothing too far from the blue box, powdered cheese, elbow noodle dinner. Creamy cheddar mac and cheese doesn't have to contain all the fat typically found in comfort foods. Since cottage cheese has a high moisture content even when it's low-fat, using it in a cheese blend, with strong tasting varieties like parmesan, will accentuate the flavor, and is a great way to make a leaner version without sacrificing the richness of flavour or the luscious texture. Use whole grain pasta, or better yet, employ quinoa or whole grain rice instead of pasta, substitute rice pasta and gluten-free flour for a gluten free option, replace butter with olive oil, add Greek yogurt instead of heavy cream, add chopped veggies such as broccoli and cauliflower or even creamy avocado to your

recipe. Eat it straight out of the pot with a spoon...no judgement here.

Love meatloaf but hate its nutritional profile? It's simple, fast, and delicious. What's not to love? Plus, it's easy to stretch, so it's budget-friendly. Whether served for lunch at the school cafeteria or as Sunday night dinner, you've likely had more than your fair share. And though it doesn't exactly have a reputation as the most fascinating, attractive or healthy dish, after all how sexy can a pile of ground beef be? When you toss in a few unexpected herbs & spices, cut out some fat, substitute with alternative proteins, meatloaf recipes can become a hell of a lot more impressive. Instead of ALL beef or a beef/ pork combo substitute half ground turkey with half ground beef, use a fattier ground turkey (so the loaf isn't overly dry) and a leaner beef (to cut down on the fat but keep the beefy flavor). Instead of using bread or bread crumbs like most traditional recipes, try going low-carb by using high-protein quinoa to add a nutty flavor and lighten the meaty consistency. Feeling creative? Throw some veggies in the mix, grated carrots or zucchini and some finely minced bell peppers really raise the "wow" factor well adding additional nutrients. Try Meatloaf as a muffin! The individual servings are great for portion control as well as next-day lunches. The following comfort food recipes are in full rotation in my home from November to April.

<https://www.skinnytaste.com/crock-pot-3-bean-turkey-chili-3125-pts/>

<https://www.bettycrocker.com/recipes/skinny-macaroni-and-cheese/2d17d966-002c-4461-9410-8918fdd6a414>

<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/213211/turkey-and-quinoa-meatloaf/>

To satisfy both your body and mind, seek out comfort foods that fill your belly, warm you up, and make you feel good, but are also good for you. With a few strategic changes we can satisfy our cravings and feel extra comforted knowing we did it in a healthier way.



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