

400 THAI & CHINESE



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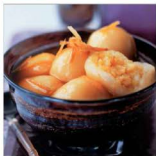
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INTRODUCTION

The food and cooking styles of Thailand and China are among the most popular in the world, and they can also be included among the healthiest. They feature simple and fresh ingredients, fragrant herbs and spices, and quick cooking techniques which preserve flavor and nutritional value.

The majority of people living in Southeast Asia have a very healthy diet, which is low in fat, high in fiber, with plenty of vegetables and relatively small amounts of meat. Much of their protein comes from fish and tofu, both of which are low-fat foods. Noodles and rice form the bulk of most meals, and processed foods are seldom eaten. In part, this diet evolved through necessity. Subsistence workers could not afford to eat

large quantities of meat on a daily basis, even though pork, duck and chickens were – and still remain – an important part of the diet. Unfortunately, increased prosperity has caused higher fat consumption in countries like China. In major cities like Beijing, where individuals have adopted a more Western diet, the incidence of coronary heart disease is on the rise.

Some of the dishes exported to the West are more so healthy either. Pork that has been dipped in batter, deep-fried in fat and then coated in a syrupy sauce is never going to make it to the list of best choices for optimum nutrition. Nor is the practice of smothering a dish by stirring in pure lard to be recommended.

Countries in South-east Asia can however provide a great source of healthy, low-fat recipes. Asian cooks are fussy about what they eat, and ingredients are chosen with considerable care. Visit any open-air market and you will see cooks offering through piles of goods to choose one that is just the right size of spiciness for the meal they have planned. Meat and fish must be very fresh, a fact that can be a bit daunting to the visitor invited to choose their meal while it is still outstanding in a

Right: The use of the wok has grown from its origins in Asia into a pan used all over the world for cooking

task, but which proves beyond any doubt that the item in question will be fresh.

A HEALTHY WAY OF COOKING

Steaming and stir-frying are two of the most popular cooking methods in Southeast Asia. Both these methods are ideal for the low-fat cook, since they require little or no oil to be used.

The wok is the principal source. This extraordinarily versatile pan, with its rounded bottom, was originally designed to fit snugly on a traditional Asian brazier or stove. Modern versions have flatter bases, so prevent wobble on electric stoves, but are still very efficient: in the even way they cook and retain heat. The sloping sides mean that the food always returns to the center, where the heat is most intense.

Many of the woks on sale today

are non-stick. Although traditional carbonized steel woks are the ones purist choose, because they are so efficient, non-stick woks are better for low-fat cooking, since they make it possible to stir-fry with the smallest amount of oil.

When stir-frying, the best technique is to place the wok over the heat without any oil. When the pan is hot, drizzle drops of oil in a circle so as to the inner surface just below the rim. As the drops sizzle down the pan, they coat the sides, then puddle in the base. You can get away with using just about a teaspoon of oil if you follow this method. Add the food to be cooked when the oil is very hot, and keep it moving. This is done with a pair of chopsticks, but the easiest way is to use two spatulas or spoons, as when tossing a salad.

Add a meal treat to a wok and it



Above: Chinese greens like pak choi (bok choy) and Chinese leaves (Chinese as cabbage) are delicious raw in salads or stir-fried with just a drop of oil.

becomes a steamer. Better still, use a bamboo steamer. These attractive-looking utensils look rather like hot boxes, and come with tightly fitting domed lids. You can stack several tiers on top of each other over a wok partly filled with water. No fat will be needed and the food will taste delicious.

A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Most of us eat fats in some form or another every day and we all need a small amount of fat in our diet to maintain a healthy, balanced eating plan. However, many of us eat far too much fat, and we should all be looking to reduce our overall fat intake, especially of saturated fats, and choose the healthier unsaturated fats.

Regular exercise is also an important factor in a healthy lifestyle, and we should all be aiming to exercise three times a week for a minimum of half an hour each session. Swimming, brisk walking, jogging, dancing, skipping and cycling are all good forms of aerobic exercise promoting a healthy heart.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This cookbook brings together a wide selection of delicious and nutritious dishes, all of which are low in fat, and are ideal to include as part of a healthy and low-fat eating plan.

The book includes plenty of useful and informative advice. A succinct introduction gives a blueprint for healthy eating and has helpful tips on low-fat and fat-free ingredients and cooking techniques. There are tips for reducing fat, especially saturated fat, in your diet, and the sections on ingredients provides an insight into fruits, vegetables, meats and other essentials. All the shopping recipes are designed to be enjoyed by the whole family. They range from soups, appetizers and light bites to hot and cold desserts and these are full of delicious main course dishes for meat eaters and vegetarians. The chapters throughout the book is on good food with maximum taste, and if you don't let us that the dishes are also low in fat, nobody is likely to guess.

THE LOW-FAT RECIPES

Each recipe includes a nutritional breakdown, giving an at-a-glance guide to calorie and fat content (including saturated and polyunsaturated content) per serving, as well as other key components such as protein, carbohydrate, calcium, cholesterol, fibre and sodium. All the recipes in this collection are low in fat. Many contain five grams of total fat or less per serving, and a few are even lower in fat, with under one gram per serving. One or two classic recipes, such as Marinated Duck Curry (see page 268), and Beef in Oyster Sauce (see page 314), contain slightly more fat, but even these contain less than in the traditional version.

For ease of reference, all recipes with a



Above: Keep the food moving when cooking in a wok. Large chopsticks like these are widely available in good Asian food stores.

single * after the recipe title contains a maximum of five grams of total fat, those with ** contain a maximum of 10 grams of total fat and those with *** contain up to 15 grams of total fat per portion. Each recipe also has a complete breakdown of the energy, protein, carbohydrate, cholesterol, calcium, fibre and sodium values of the food.

Although the recipes are low in fat, they lose nothing in terms of flavor. This practical cookbook will enable you to enjoy healthy Asian food with a clear conscience. All the recipes are easy to cook and many are so quick that you'll have supper on the table in less time than it would have taken to collect a take-away.

Left: When food is cooked in a steamer, there is no need for any fat to be used. A bamboo steamer like this one is ideal. Several can be stacked on top of each other if you're cooking many dishes.



THE LOW-FAT THAI AND CHINESE KITCHEN



Cooks in Thailand and China have much to teach us about low-fat cooking. Their traditional diet is largely composed of vegetables, with a healthy proportion of carbohydrate in the form of noodles or rice, protein in the form of tofu and only small amounts of poultry, meat and seafood. You will find a selection of many popular dishes from across South-east Asia in this book, as well as some less well-known recipes, but they are all delicious and perfect for a low-fat diet.