



November Is Time For Comfort Foods

by Erin McGraw

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The weather is getting chillier by the day, and there is nothing quite like coming in from the cold and sitting down to a hot, hearty meal. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “comfort food”? Maybe it’s piping-hot macaroni and cheese with a crunchy, golden-brown crust, or chewy, gooey chocolate chip cookies warm from the oven with a cold glass of milk. How about a mound of fluffy mashed potatoes with a pool of melted butter dripping down the side?

Comfort foods are "feel good" foods. They soothe and nurture us, and encourage that secure, "filled-up" feeling in our stomachs. Savoring a favorite food takes us back to a time when we felt happy and nourished, loved and cared for. It is hard to argue with that kind of power, especially in today's world. "When we're anxious or fearful, we go back to foods we associate with stress-free times," says nutrition educator Erin McGraw with the St. Louis District Dairy Council.

It's important to note that these foods can come with a steep nutritional price tag. Digging into comfort foods all winter may contribute to certain health risks, as they can be high in fat, calories and sugar. However, that doesn't mean we can't enjoy finding comfort in foods we crave. Although they may be high in calories, comfort foods have a place in a healthy diet. Many contain wonderful nutrients for the body, such as those found in dairy products used in mac and cheese or the milk that often accompanies cookies. "One serving of dairy supplies one-third of the daily calcium needs along with 8 additional nutrients. Rest assured, comfort foods have nutritional benefits as well" states McGraw.

Restricting foods that we love can lead to feelings of deprivation, which could trigger an eating binge. The key lies in limiting the frequency of indulging in comfort food favorites and keeping an eye on portion size. "A little indulgence once in a while is a healthy approach," assures McGraw.

Keep the Comfort, Lose the Calories. Is it possible to enjoy comfort foods, while also keeping health and wellness in check? With a few tried-and-true kitchen tricks, most comfort foods can survive a calorie renovation while keeping taste buds and tummies happy. Lightening up favorite comfort foods is all about the three R's: reduce, replace and remove.

Reduce the high calorie ingredients in the recipe or reduce the serving sizes.

Replace ingredients high in fat and sugar with reduced-fat or reduced-sugar ingredients.

Remove unnecessary high-fat or high-sugar ingredients completely when you can.

With the three R's in mind, we can continue to enjoy favorite meals and stay healthy throughout the winter season. Enjoying delicious and nutritious foods without a guilty conscience is possible! Rest easy knowing dairy-rich comfort foods are providing you and your family with wonderful taste and nutrition.

For more healthy comfort food recipes or additional information about St. Louis District Dairy Council visit www.stldairycouncil.org, call 314-835-9668 or email emcgraw@stldairycouncil.org. To learn more about local dairy promotion efforts in Illinois and Missouri, check us out on Facebook and Instagram at STLDairyCouncil.



Recipes

Mashed Potato and Cauliflower Gratin

Keep the Comfort, Lose the Calories. It is possible to enjoy comfort foods, while also keeping health and wellness in check. With a few swaps and tricks enjoy this delicious recipe that has undergone a major calorie renovation!

Makes 8 servings

Prep Time: 1 hour

Total Time: 2 hours

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds russet (baking) potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

Salt

1 1/4 cups whole milk, divided

1 stick (8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, divided

4 ounces coarsely grated Italian Fontina or Gruyère (about 1 cup packed)

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 (2- to 2 1/2-pound) head cauliflower, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces, including stems and core

3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed

3/4 to 1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, divided

INSTRUCTION

1. Place potatoes and 2 teaspoons salt in a large heavy saucepan and generously cover with cold water (about 2 1/2 quarts). Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, until potatoes are tender; about 15 to 20 minutes.
2. While potatoes are cooking, heat 3/4 cup milk and 3 tablespoons butter in a small saucepan until butter is melted and milk is hot, but not boiling. Remove from heat; keep warm, covered.
3. Drain potatoes well in a colander and return to large saucepan. Add milk/butter mixture, Fontina cheese, and pepper; mash with a potato masher or fork to desired consistency. Season with salt and keep warm, covered.
4. Bring a pot of well-salted water to a boil, then add cauliflower and garlic; simmer until cauliflower is very tender, 13 to 15 minutes.
5. Drain cauliflower in a colander and place in food processor with remaining milk, 1/2 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, and 3 tablespoons butter. Puree until chunky.
6. Stir together mashed potatoes and cauliflower mixture in a large bowl and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a buttered 3-quart flameproof shallow baking dish (not glass).
7. Heat oven to 425°F with rack in middle. Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter and gently brush over potato-cauliflower mixture. Sprinkle remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano evenly on top. Bake until potato mixture bubbles around edges, about 20 minutes.
8. Turn on oven broiler and broil (6 to 8 inches from heat) until topping begins to brown, 1 to 2 minutes

NUTRITION: Calories 233, Protein 9g, Carbohydrates 14g, Fat 17g, DV Calcium 8.6%



Turkey and Zucchini Layered Lasagna

The weather is getting chillier by the day, and there is nothing quite like coming in from the cold and sitting down to a hot, hearty meal. Try out this healthy twist on a traditional comfort food and warm up from the cold!

Servings: 6

Prep Time: 15 min

Total Time: 1 hour

INGREDIENTS

1 (16-ounce) package Extra Lean Ground Turkey Breast

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 (15 ounce) can tomato sauce

1 carrot, shredded

1 ½ teaspoons dried crushed oregano

1 ½ teaspoons dried basil

1 ½ teaspoons fennel seeds

1 pound (about 3 medium) zucchini, sliced lengthwise in 0.25-inch thick slices

1 cup part-skim ricotta cheese, divided
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oven to 350°F.
2. Mist 9–inch square baking pan with cooking spray.
3. Spray a skillet with nonstick cooking spray. Preheat skillet over medium-high heat.
4. Add ground turkey to hot skillet. Stir to crumble while cooking, approximately 14 to 16 minutes. Cook to well-done, 165°F, as measured by a meat thermometer.
5. Add garlic, tomato sauce, carrot, oregano, basil and fennel seed. Bring to boil; remove from heat.
6. Place 1/3 of the zucchini slices on bottom of baking pan.
7. Spread half of the mozzarella, ricotta, Parmesan cheeses on top of the zucchini.
8. Layer half of the turkey mixture on top. Repeat layers finishing with layer of zucchini and mozzarella cheese.
9. Bake, uncovered 45 minutes or until bubbly and cheese is browned.

NUTRITION: Calories 270, Protein 33g, Carbohydrates 15g, Fat 9g, DV Calcium 13%

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