Healthy Cooking Techniques

Healthy cooking doesn't mean that you have to become a gourmet chef or invest in expensive cookware. Simply use basic cooking methods to prepare foods in healthy ways.

These cooking techniques offer ways to best capture the flavor and nutrients from your food without adding excessive amounts of fat or salt. Once you've mastered these techniques, use them often to prepare your favorite dishes.

1. **Baking.** Besides breads and desserts, use this method to cook uniform-sized pieces of vegetables, fruit, seafood, poultry or lean meat. Place food in a pan or dish surrounded by the hot, dry air of your oven. You may cook the food covered or uncovered. Baking generally doesn't require that you add fat to the food.

2. **Braising.** This method involves browning the ingredient first in an open or covered pan on top of the stove, and then slowly cooking it with a small quantity of liquid. In some recipes, the cooking liquid is used afterward to form a flavorful, nutrient-rich sauce.

3. **Enhancing.** Creating meals using spices and herbs is one of the best ways to add color, taste and aroma to foods. Choose fresh herbs that look bright and aren't wilted. Add them toward the end of cooking. Add dried herbs in the earlier stages of cooking. When substituting dried for fresh, use about one-third the amount.

4. **Grilling and broiling.** Both of these cooking methods expose fairly thin pieces of food to direct heat. To grill outdoors, place the food on a grill rack above a bed of charcoal embers or gas-heated rocks. For grilling smaller items, use a long-handled grill basket, which prevents pieces from slipping through the rack. To broil indoors, place food on a broiler rack below a heat element. Both methods allow fat to drip away from the food.

5. **Poaching.** To poach foods, gently simmer ingredients in water or a flavorful liquid such as broth, vinegar or juice until they're cooked through and tender. The food retains its shape during cooking. For stove-top poaching, choose a covered pan that best fits the size and shape of the food so that you use a minimum amount of liquid. You can also poach foods in foil packets in the oven or on the grill.

6. **Roasting.** Like baking, but typically at higher temperatures, roasting uses an oven's dry heat to cook the food. You can roast foods on a baking sheet or in a roasting pan. For poultry, seafood and meat, place a rack inside the roasting pan so that the fat in the ingredients can drip away during cooking.

7. **Sautéing.** This method quickly cooks relatively small or thin pieces of food. If you choose a good-quality nonstick pan, you can cook food without using fat. Depending on the recipe, use broth, nonstick cooking spray or water in place of oil.

8. **Steaming.** One of the simplest cooking techniques to master is steaming food in a perforated basket suspended above simmering liquid. If you use a flavorful liquid or add seasonings to the water, you'll flavor the food as it cooks.

9. **Stir-frying.** A traditional Asian method, stir-frying quickly cooks small, uniform-sized pieces of food while they're rapidly stirred in a wok or large nonstick frying pan. You need only a small amount of oil or nonstick cooking spray.

Source: www.mayoclinic.com