



RECIPES A HEART WILL LOVE

Tasty Ways to Boost Heart Health

by Avery Mack

As a special meal for Valentine's Day or any other, many plant-based dishes are so tasty that no one will miss the meat. Low in fat and sugar and high in ingredients that promote heart health, the following recipes are courtesy of Carol D'Anca, a board-certified nutrition practitioner and author of *Real Food for Healthy People: A Recipe & Resource Guide*, in Highland Park, Illinois.

Start With Soup

Rich in dietary fiber and low in fat, butternut squash with low-salt vegetable broth and spices is an easy-to-make soup loaded with nutrients and flavor. Allow 40 to 45 minutes to roast the squash.

Butternut Squash Soup

Yields: Four servings

1 butternut squash, 2-3 lbs, peeled and cut in cubes to equal 4 cups

3 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
Dash red pepper flakes
Freshly ground black pepper
Pepitas or pumpkin seeds for garnish

Preheat oven to 425° F.

Line a heavy baking pan with parchment paper. Spread squash cubes in a single layer, using two lined pans if needed. Roast for about 40 minutes or until tender when pierced with a fork.

Alternate method: Wash the squash. Make several slits to allow for escaping steam. Roast whole in the oven for about 45 minutes or until soft and easy to peel and cut.

Transfer the roasted squash to a food processor or heavy-duty blender. Add remaining ingredients and process until smooth. Add additional broth to reach desired consistency.

Natural Awakenings recommends using organic, fair trade, non-genetically modified ingredients, BPA-free canned goods and non-bromated flour whenever possible.

Divide into four bowls. For texture and crunch, garnish with roasted pepita or pumpkin seeds.

Hearty Bread

This whole-grain, gluten-free, no-knead, no-mess bread contains flax, sunflower and chia seeds, hazelnuts, oats, coconut oil and maple syrup as a sweetener. Accompanying soup, it makes for a satisfying meal.

This recipe is adapted from “Change Your Life Bread” in D’Anca’s book *My New Roots*.



Change Your Life Bread

Yields: One loaf

2 cups shelled raw sunflower seeds
1 cup whole flax seeds
1 cup blanched hazelnuts
3 cups rolled oats (use certified gluten-free oats, if needed)
4 Tbsp chia seeds
6 Tbsp psyllium husks
Pinch fresh ground coarse salt, preferably Himalayan
2 Tbsp maple syrup
6 Tbsp coconut oil, liquefied at low temperature in a small pan
3 cups water

In a loaf pan lined with parchment, combine all dry ingredients, stirring well. Whisk maple syrup and water together in a measuring cup.

Add to the dry ingredients and mix until everything is soaked and dough becomes thick. If it’s too thick to stir, add one or two teaspoons of water until it’s manageable. Smooth the top with the back of a spoon.

Let it sit on the counter for at least two hours, or all day or overnight. When the dough retains its shape, even when you pull the sides of the loaf pan or lift the parchment, it’s ready to bake.

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Place loaf pan in the oven on the middle rack and bake for 20 minutes. Remove bread from loaf pan, place it upside down directly on the rack and bake for another 30 to 40 minutes. Bread is done when it sounds hollow when tapped. Let cool completely before slicing.

Store bread in a tightly sealed container for up to five days. Freezes well. For a quick and easy toast, slice before freezing.

The Pleasures of Pasta

Pasta is guilt-free when we use a whole wheat variety that digests more slowly than white flour pasta, avoiding blood sugar spikes, D’Anca says. Gluten-free, grain-free or vegetable pasta can be substituted for whole grain pasta. Fresh asparagus is recommended. If it’s not in season, consider red chard for its bright red and green colors and abundance of vitamins K, A and C. It’s a good source of magnesium, potassium, iron and dietary fiber.



Whole Grain Pasta with Asparagus and Tomato Coulis

Yields: 6 servings for dinner or 8 as a smaller first course.

1 lb of your favorite whole grain pasta
3 large cloves garlic, roasted for about 25 minutes in their skins
3 pints cherry or grape tomatoes, halved

Use red, orange, yellow or a mix of colors
1½ Tbsp fresh thyme leaves
1 lb fresh asparagus, pencil thin is best (if not available, substitute red chard)
¼ cup pitted Kalamata olives
½ cup fresh basil
¼ cup white wine or white wine vinegar

Squeeze garlic from its skins into a large skillet. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix well. Cook over medium heat until the mixture is reduced and thickened to a sauce (coulis), about 20 to 30 minutes. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente.

Drain the pasta well and place back in the pan. Add tomato coulis and olives. Toss well to infuse flavors. Let warm for 2 to 3 minutes. Serve at once.

Savory Side Dish

Chickpeas are a great source of fiber. Bell peppers, also known as sweet peppers, are available in white, orange, green and purple. Lycopene gives red tomatoes their color, may reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol and lower blood pressure. Yellow tomatoes have twice as much iron and zinc and higher levels of vitamin B and folate to help red blood cells. Darker tomatoes ranging from purple to black produce higher levels of antioxidants for a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Don’t overlook green tomatoes, which are higher in vitamin K and calcium than reds or yellows.

Roasted Chickpeas with Grilled Vegetables

Yields: Serves two, or four if dished over quinoa

12 small mushrooms, sliced
2 ripe tomatoes, quartered
1 red bell pepper, cut in strips
1 yellow pepper, cut in strips
1 red onion, cut into wedges, or 1½ cups leeks, halved lengthwise, cleaned, and cut chiffonade-style
About 6 cloves of garlic, peeled
2, 14-oz cans of chickpeas, rinsed and drained
2 sprigs of fresh rosemary
Balsamic or white wine vinegar

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Put mushrooms, tomatoes, red and yellow peppers, onion and garlic in a large roasting pan. Roast for about 30 minutes or until the vegetables caramelize.

Remove the pan and turn the vegetables over. Add the chickpeas and rosemary and return to the oven. Roast for another 30 to 45 minutes until the edges of the vegetables start to turn dark and the chickpeas are browning.

Sprinkle with balsamic vinegar, toss and serve warm as is or over quinoa.



Burgers for Lunch

These burgers are good either oven baked or grilled, weather permitting. Offer toppings like baby spinach, salsa, nut cheese, pesto, fig jam, mango or slaw. Apple cider vinegar, dill, celery salt and agave nectar to taste makes a dressing for slaw. Thin slices of Granny Smith or Honey Crisp apples add a tang of tart or hint of sweetness.

Black Bean/Veggie Burger

1 16-oz can of black beans, drained, rinsed well and dried on a paper towel
½ red bell pepper, cut in large pieces
1 medium-size onion, cut in large pieces
1 Tbsp chili powder, mild or hot to taste
3 cloves of garlic, rough chopped
1 tsp black cumin
1 Tbsp ground flax seeds
3 Tbsp water
Approximately 1 cup bread crumbs (gluten-free if needed) to act as a binder
4 buns or bread of choice

Eating healthy doesn't mean all salads, all the time. From appetizer to dessert, healthy, easy-to-make, creative and colorful recipes can improve health and add flavor to life.



Make a flax “egg” by mixing the ground flax seeds with the water. Let it sit for 3 to 5 minutes until it thickens to an egg consistency.

Place the bell pepper, onion and garlic in a food processor and process until smooth. Remove the mixture and drain in a fine sieve. Too much liquid will make the burgers fall apart.

Place black beans in the food processor and pulse to a thick, sticky consistency. Add the drained red pepper mixture, flax “egg”, cumin and chili spice. Process until lightly mixed.

Remove the burger mixture to a bowl. Add bread crumbs until the mix forms into patties.

Grill for 5 to 10 minutes, turning once, or bake in a 350° F oven on a parchment-lined baking sheet for about 5 to 10 minutes on each side.

Guilt-Free Chocolate Dessert

“Chocolate desserts usually include loads of sugar and butter, making them a highly processed and saturated-fat food,” says D’Anca. “These treats deliver the good fat of cacao nibs and the antioxidants of raw cacao.”

Almond Butter and Raw Cacao Chocolate Truffles

Yields: 12 servings

1 cup almond meal
½ cup almond butter
¼ cup raw cacao, organic
3 Tbsp grade B maple syrup
1 tsp organic vanilla
¼ cup raw almonds, ground
¼ cup raw cacao nibs, ground
Finely ground nuts like walnuts or hazelnuts, shredded coconut or raw cacao for texture and added flavor

Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl and mix them to a smooth batter. Chill the batter for about 20 minutes.

Roll into either bite-sized or larger balls to serve as is or roll in nuts, coconut or cacao for texture and added taste.

For more recipes and information about nutrition and heart health provided by D’Anca, visit FoodNotMeds.com.

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