



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

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It's Spice Time: Adding Herbs and Spices During Meal Preparation

Herbs and spices are used for seasoning food and providing an array of flavors to otherwise bland meals. But what are herbs and spices, and are they the same thing? In most cases, herbs and spices are distinctly different. Herbs are the leaves or soft portions of plants and are available in fresh or dried form. Spices, on the other hand, are the roots, buds, flowers, fruits, bark, or seeds of plants and are usually available in dried and ground form. Learning to use herbs and spices during meal preparation can be helpful in serving more nutritious and appealing meals and snacks.



There are numerous ways to use herbs, spices, and blends. For example, some herbs, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and cloves, are great for replacing sugar. While other herbs, such as cumin, and garlic, are great for replacing salt. Additionally, blending different herbs and spices can add a variety of flavors for many food items. For example, blending sage, thyme, marjoram, and savory makes a great blend for seasoning poultry. Another tasty blend is basil, garlic, oregano, and rosemary for spaghetti, pizza, and other Italian entrees. As you begin to use herbs and spices, it will take time, practice, and patience

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to learn how to build and blend flavors effectively. Each herb and spice has its own flavor and some are stronger than others. Therefore, always gradually add herbs and spices when preparing meals until the product has a good taste and smell.

For example, begin with about 1/4 teaspoon per pint or pound of a food product and gradually add more fresh, dried, or ground herbs and spices. Taking the time to learn how to use herbs and spices to build flavors will not only create flavorful meals, but it will also help you create meals that appeal to young children.

Check out the following tips for preparing meals with herbs and spices:

- **Tip #1:** Use fresh onion, fresh garlic, onion powder, or garlic powder instead of salty spice mixes, garlic salt, or onion salt.
- **Tip #2:** Purchase seasoning mixes that do not contain monosodium glutamate (MSG) or where salt is not the primary ingredient.
- **Tip #3:** Add the herbs or spices at the start of cooking in quick-cooking food, such as vegetables.
- **Tip #4:** Add herbs and spices in the final 45 minutes of cooking in slow-cooking food, such as soups and stews.
- **Tip #5:** Infuse (steep) herbs and spices in vinegars, oils, stocks, and juice to enhance the flavor before the liquids are used in recipes.

In conclusion, adding herbs and spices are great for creating flavorful meals without added salt or sugar. Always remember to gradually add herbs and spices because too much or too little can create unappealing meals for young children. For additional tips on preparing food with herbs and spices using a variety of different cooking methods, contact the Institute of Child Nutrition's Help Desk at 800-321-3054 or helpdesk@theicn.org.

Fruit of the Month: Peach



The fruit of the month is the peach. Peaches were first harvested in China, dating back to the 1100's, and later introduced to the United States in the early 1500's. Peaches are grown throughout the United States in Georgia, Colorado, South Carolina, and New Jersey. Consequently, the United States is well known for providing about 25% of the world's supply of peaches.

Peaches are normally found in two colors, yellow or white, but they are available in many varieties. Additionally, the characteristics and quality of peaches can vary according to their native state's season. Some states begin harvesting peaches as early as April, while others begin as late as August. Regardless of the time of year, peaches offer many essential nutrients and make a great addition to any meal.



Nutrition Fact

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates how most food items are processed, packaged, and labeled. Additionally, the FDA determines what claims, such as “fat-free” or “calorie free,” are stated on food labels or packages. Knowing the meanings of these commonly used claims can help you find what you need to meet your nutritional needs.

Listed below are some common claims (found on food packages and food labels) and their meanings.

- Fat-Free – Per serving, there is less than 0.5 grams of fat.
- Calorie Free – Per serving, there are less than 5 calories.
- Low Sodium – Per serving, there are 140 mg or less of sodium.
- Sugar Free – Per serving, there is less than 0.5 grams of sugar.

As you shop for groceries, remember these terms and their meanings as they will help you select those food items that are best for you and the children in your care.



Recipe of the Month Chicken Alfredo with a Twist

Are you looking for a tasty, yet nutritious recipe that incorporates whole-wheat noodles, lean chicken, and cheese? Checkout the Chicken Alfredo with a Twist recipe below.

Ingredients:

2.5 cups Rotini pasta, whole-wheat, dry (10 ounces)
2 cans low-fat, reduced-sodium cream of chicken soup
1 1/3 cups fat-free half-and-half
1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
1/3 cup grated parmesan cheese
3 cups cooked, diced chicken, 1/2” pieces (12 ounces)

Directions:

Boil 2 quarts of water in a large pot; gradually add pasta, and cook for 8-10 minutes or until the pasta is tender. Then, drain the pasta well. Next, mix soup, half-and-half, pepper, garlic powder, parmesan cheese, and chicken in a large pot. Cook for 5 minutes over medium heat, stirring often. Make sure the heat reaches 165 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds for food safety. Combine noodles and sauce right before serving. Best served when hot!

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 15 minutes

Yield: 6 servings

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