

Cozy Fall Foods with a Healthy Twist

by Cassie I. Story, RDN

Autumn's crisp air and changing colors invite us into the kitchen for warm, comforting meals. Many traditional favorites are rich and heavy, but with a few smart swaps those foods can be full of flavor while supporting your health. Seasonal ingredients like squash, apples and Brussels sprouts bring color and nutrition to the plate, making fall a perfect time to enjoy the dishes you love.

Why Fall Nutrition Matters

Seasonal produce does more than make your plate look colorful—it gives your body important nutrients to help you feel your best. Pumpkin and sweet potatoes are packed with vitamin A which supports healthy eyes. Brussels sprouts provide vitamin C to boost your immune system. Apples are full of antioxidants that protect your cells. Oats give you steady energy with their fiber and beans add protein to keep your muscles strong and your stomach full. From breakfast to dessert, fall foods can bring cozy flavors to your table in healthier, lighter ways.



Cozy Pumpkin Oat Cups

Ingredients:

- 2 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 cup canned pumpkin puree
- 2 large eggs
- ⅓ cup maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- ½ cup diced apples or raisins
- Optional: 1 scoop (about ¼ cup) vanilla or unflavored protein powder

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly coat a 12-cup muffin tin with nonstick spray or line with paper liners. In a large bowl, whisk together yogurt, pumpkin, eggs, maple syrup and vanilla until smooth. Stir in oats, cinnamon, baking powder, salt, fruit and protein powder if using. Divide mixture evenly into muffin cups. Bake for 18 to 22 minutes, or until set and lightly golden. Cool before removing. Enjoy warm or refrigerate for up to 5 days for an easy grab-and-go breakfast.



Harvest Morning Frittata

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 small sweet potato, peeled and diced
- 2 cups chopped kale
- 8 large eggs
- ¼ cup milk or unsweetened milk alternative
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 375°F. Heat oil in an oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Add onion and sweet potato; cook for 5–7 minutes until softened. Stir in kale and cook until just wilted. In a bowl, whisk eggs with milk, garlic powder, paprika, salt and pepper. Pour over vegetables. Cook on the stove for 2 minutes, then transfer to the oven. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the center is set.

Nutrition note: Sweet potato is rich in beta carotene, a form of vitamin A that supports vision and immune health.

Autumn Orchard Salad

Ingredients:

- 2 apples, cored and sliced
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- Pinch of cinnamon
- 6 cups baby spinach or arugula
- ¼ cup crumbled goat cheese
- ¼ cup pumpkin seeds
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Heat oven to 400°F. Toss apple slices with 1 teaspoon oil and cinnamon. Roast for 10 to 12 minutes, until edges are lightly browned. Whisk 2 tablespoons of oil with vinegar, maple syrup, salt and pepper. In a large bowl, combine greens, warm apples, goat cheese and pumpkin seeds. Drizzle with dressing and toss gently. Kids in the kitchen: Invite kids to sprinkle in the pumpkin seeds and help mix the salad before serving.



Golden Harvest Mash

Ingredients:

- 1 medium butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cubed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 tablespoons plain full-fat Greek yogurt
- 2 to 3 tablespoons milk or unsweetened milk alternative
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 2 to 3 fresh sage leaves, finely chopped (or ½ teaspoon dried)
- Pinch of red pepper flakes, optional
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Heat oven to 400°F. Spread squash on a baking sheet and toss with olive oil, salt and pepper. Roast 25 to 30 minutes, until tender and lightly browned. Transfer squash to a large bowl and mash until mostly smooth. Stir in Greek yogurt and milk and continue to mash until smooth and creamy. Mix in maple syrup, sage and red pepper flakes if using. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Nutrition note: Sage provides antioxidants that protect your cells while capsaicin in red pepper flakes stimulates digestion and has natural anti-inflammatory properties.



Pumpkin Patch Chili

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 pound lean ground turkey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, rinsed
- 1 can (15 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- 1½ cups low-sodium broth
- Salt and pepper to taste



Instructions:

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and bell pepper; cook until softened. Stir in turkey and cook until browned, breaking it up with a spoon. Add garlic, chili powder, cumin and oregano. Cook for 1 minute, stirring often. Stir in beans, tomatoes, pumpkin and broth. Bring to a simmer and cook for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season to taste. Serve warm with optional toppings like shredded cheese, avocado or cilantro. Tip: Create a topping bar with fresh herbs, diced onion or a spoonful of Greek yogurt so everyone can make their bowl their own.



Pumpkin Cloud Cups

Ingredients:

- 1 (15-oz) can pumpkin puree
- 1 (3.4-oz) packet sugar-free vanilla instant pudding mix
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1 (8-oz) container sugar-free whipped topping, thawed
- Optional garnish: crushed graham crackers, toasted pecans or a sprinkle of cinnamon

Instructions:

In a large bowl, whisk together pumpkin puree, dry pudding mix and pumpkin pie spice until smooth. Gently fold in whipped topping until the mixture is light and fluffy. Spoon into small cups or jars and refrigerate at least 2 hours before serving. Top with graham cracker crumbs, pecans or cinnamon just before serving. Tip: For an easy party dessert, pipe the fluff into clear cups or small jars for a festive, ready-to-serve presentation.

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Bringing it All Together

Fall cooking can be both soothing and supportive, filling your table with flavor and health. These recipes show how small changes, such as using yogurt instead of cream or making a mash from butternut squash instead of potatoes, can keep fall favorites lighter and more nutrient dense while still comforting. The best part is that these changes do not require perfection. You can start with one new habit, like adding a seasonal vegetable to dinner or choosing a lighter topping for your chili. Cooking with fall ingredients can also be a way to slow down and connect. Roast apples with your kids, stir a pot of chili with a friend nearby or whisk together pumpkin cloud cups while music plays in the background. The kitchen becomes a place not only to nourish your body but also to create moments of warmth and memory. This season, let your meals remind you that comfort and health can share the same table.

About the Author:

Cassie I. Story, RDN, is a bariatric nutrition expert with over 20 years of experience. She is Director of Nutrition at Bariatric Advantage, a national speaker, published author and peer reviewer for Obesity Surgery. Follow her on TikTok @SoundsLikeSassy.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

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