

# LIGHT IT UP!

## Easy, Healthy Meals from the Grill

*By Katie Chapmon, MS, RD*

Summer is upon us! It's time to invite your friends over, clean off the picnic table and fire up the grill to celebrate the season. Grilling your food can bring out the smoky flavors and crispy texture that is unique to this cooking style. Although we typically think of hot dogs and burgers as the usual grill fare, there are a number of ways to make this summertime tradition a healthy option.

### Great Options for Grilling:

- **Grill turkey burgers and turkey dogs instead of beef to reduce the amount of fat in your meal.** You can also choose chicken or turkey breasts for an even lighter option. To really mix it up, try a nice chickpea or black bean burger.
- **Increase your nutrients with a vegetable medley.** Add color and flavor to your meal with vegetables cooked on the grill. Use a little olive oil or vinaigrette to baste vegetables such as peppers, corn, eggplant or onions before grilling.
- **Grill your dessert!** You can grill fruit kebabs, pineapple slices or peach halves on low heat until the fruit is hot and slightly golden.

"**GRILLING** can be a **HEALTHIER** option as you **NEED LESS OIL** than sautéing and fat drips off meat during the cooking process."



# BASIC RECIPES FOR SUMMERTIME GRILLING:

(Adapted from a family recipe)



## CHICKEN:

1. Spray skinless chicken breasts with cooking oil.
2. Sprinkle on your favorite spice, such as Trader Joe's Everything but the Bagel or Spike.
3. Turn grill on high. Grill until a nice golden-brown color and use your meat thermometer to check the internal temperature.

*(Inside Tip: You can share this one with your favorite dog pal)*



## VEGETABLES:

1. Wash and chop peppers, broccoli florets, cauliflower, onion, mushrooms, carrots, zucchini, asparagus or any vegetables you like into similar-sized cubes.
2. Mix the vegetables together in a medium-sized bowl with olive oil, garlic salt and/or your favorite seasoning.
3. Place all vegetables in single layer on a sheet of aluminum foil packet or grill basket.
4. Place the packet or basket on the grill when the temperature is around 450°F. Let cook for approximately 12 minutes or until soft.
5. Remove packet or basket from the grill.
6. Lightly sprinkle with salt, pepper and maybe a little Parmesan cheese. Serve immediately.

## DESSERT:

1. Use a grill basket or skewer to grill peaches, plums, pineapple, mangoes or any other fruit you like.
2. Sprinkle them with cinnamon, chili powder or even toss with a teaspoon of vanilla extract before or after grilling.
3. Serve on their own or with vanilla yogurt.



## FISH:

1. Use a 2-inch deep, 9x9 disposable aluminum pan.
2. Spray pan with cooking spray.
3. Place salmon or cod skin down in tray.
4. Dab with a bit of oil and lime juice, sprinkle with seasoning and top with sliced onion or chopped green onions.
5. Cook until the fish looks done and check to see that the internal temperature has reached 145°F with a meat thermometer, or that the fish is opaque and easily flakes with a fork.

*(Inside Tip: If cooking more than one piece, make sure they are the same thickness to ensure that they are done at the same time)*

## SIDE DISH IDEAS:

- Trade your traditional mayo-heavy coleslaw for a fresh grilled carrot salad dressed with plain Greek yogurt, raisins and chopped apples.
- Combine whole grain pasta and grilled vegetables such as broccoli or colorful peppers to create a healthier pasta salad.



# FINAL TIPS FOR HEALTHY GRILLING SUCCESS:

## Nutrition on the Grill:

There is no perfect cooking method that retains all the nutrients of each food. In general, cooking for shorter periods at lower temperatures with a little water will keep the most nutrients in your foods. When grilling meats, up to 40% of B vitamins and some minerals may be lost when nutrient-rich juices drip during the grilling process. However, grilling can be a healthier option as you need less oil than sautéing and fat drips off the meat during the cooking process.

There are some concerns that well-done or charred meat may increase the risk of developing cancer. Cooking meat at high temperatures causes chemicals called HCAs (*heterocyclic amines*) and PAHs (*polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons*) to form. These chemicals can cause changes in DNA that can lead to cancer. They form when meat is grilled and fat drips onto a hot surface. The good news is that PAHs can be decreased by 41-89% if fat drips and smoke is minimized. You can also reduce the risk of PAHs by choosing lean meats and trimming the fat before grilling or even flipping your food more frequently.



**Pick the perfect protein.** Fish, skinless chicken breast and lean ground poultry are all healthy choices. Healthier fats in fish like salmon and trout have added health benefits. If you choose meat or pork, get “loin” or “round” cuts and “choice” or “select” grades of beef instead of “prime.”

**Right-size your portions.** A healthy portion of any type of meat is about three ounces, or the size of a deck of cards, and definitely no more than six ounces. A fun way to have portion control is to make sliders instead of full-size burgers.

**Give it a soak or rub.** Marinating or rubbing spices on poultry, fish, beef or pork can add amazing flavor without adding salt. Make a simple rub of your favorite spice (*such as allspice, chili powder, cinnamon, cumin, garlic powder, paprika or rosemary*) and black pepper.

**Let the simple grilled goodness shine through.** Don't drown your grilled masterpiece in salty sauces, sugary condiments or heavy dressings. Sometimes, a simple squeeze of lemon or lime juice is all it needs.

**Buy whole-grain buns.** Whole-grain buns and breads will complement your healthy feast with extra fiber, flavor and texture. If you're watching your calories and carbs, try an open-faced burger or lettuce wrap.

**Keep it clean.** This isn't the fun part, but be sure to clean the rack or grill pan after each use. Removing leftover burnt pieces of food stuck to the grill prevents burning, smoking and bitter flavors the next time you use it.

Now that you have some tips of the grilling trade, gather your family and friends to enjoy a wonderful (*and healthy*) summertime meal!

### About the Author:

*Katie Chapmon, MS, RD, is a Los Angeles-based Registered Dietitian specializing in the field of metabolic surgery and weight management since 2008. She currently works with individuals at Your Life Nutrition practice in Pasadena, California. Katie is the recipient of the 2018 Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) Weight Management Excellence in Practice Award. Throughout her years in this field, she has presented on various subjects at national conferences and for several societies surrounding weight management and metabolic surgery. She plays active roles on committees with the American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery and AND Weight Management Dietetic Practice Group.*