

Tip of the Day:

Cooking Makeovers

Although most restaurant owners would rather I didn't tell you this, research has shown that you have a better chance of controlling your weight if you eat at home. But even eating at home can have a negative effect on your waistline, depending on *how* you cook. Here are a few tips on keeping your kitchen "light."

Stuff It With Vegetables

The next time you throw a burger on the grill, it doesn't have to wreak havoc with your diet — just a few simple substitutions can save you many calories and a lot of fat. To start, use lean ground beef instead of regular beef; for even less fat, try ground turkey. Next, give your burger some extra texture and flavor by mixing the meat with chopped mushrooms, peppers, and onions — the burger will be the same size, but it will have fewer calories — and you'll be getting the health benefits of all those vegetables.

For variety, experiment with other vegetables, like chopped water chestnuts and sun-dried (not oil-packed) tomatoes. Vegetables work great as fillers for many other foods as well — the classics are omelets and sandwiches. You can use this technique when you're making meat loaf. To compensate for the lack of fat in the beef, spray the pan with cooking spray (such as Pam) to keep the meat from sticking.

- Hamburger with regular ground beef (6 ounces): 481 calories, 34 g fat, 0 g carbs, 40 g protein
- Hamburger with lean ground beef and vegetables (6 ounces): 364 calories, 21 g fat, 14 g carbs, 30 g protein

Switch Out the Dairy

You can replace almost any dairy product (for example, cheese, milk, and sour cream) that a recipe calls for with a low-fat or nonfat version, saving a significant number of calories. Terry Conlan, the author of *Fresh* (Favorite Recipes Press, 2002) and the executive chef at the Lake Austin Spa Resort in Austin, Texas, says his single favorite product for cooking is fat-free sweetened condensed milk. "It does everything that whole condensed milk will do for a lot less calories. We use it to make flan, cream pies, roasted tomato bisque, and much more." He also recommends melting reduced-fat or fat-free cream cheese to use in lieu of heavy cream or half-and-half. For example, he makes a quick and easy key lime pie using fat-free sweetened condensed milk with a combination of fat-free and reduced-fat cream cheese.