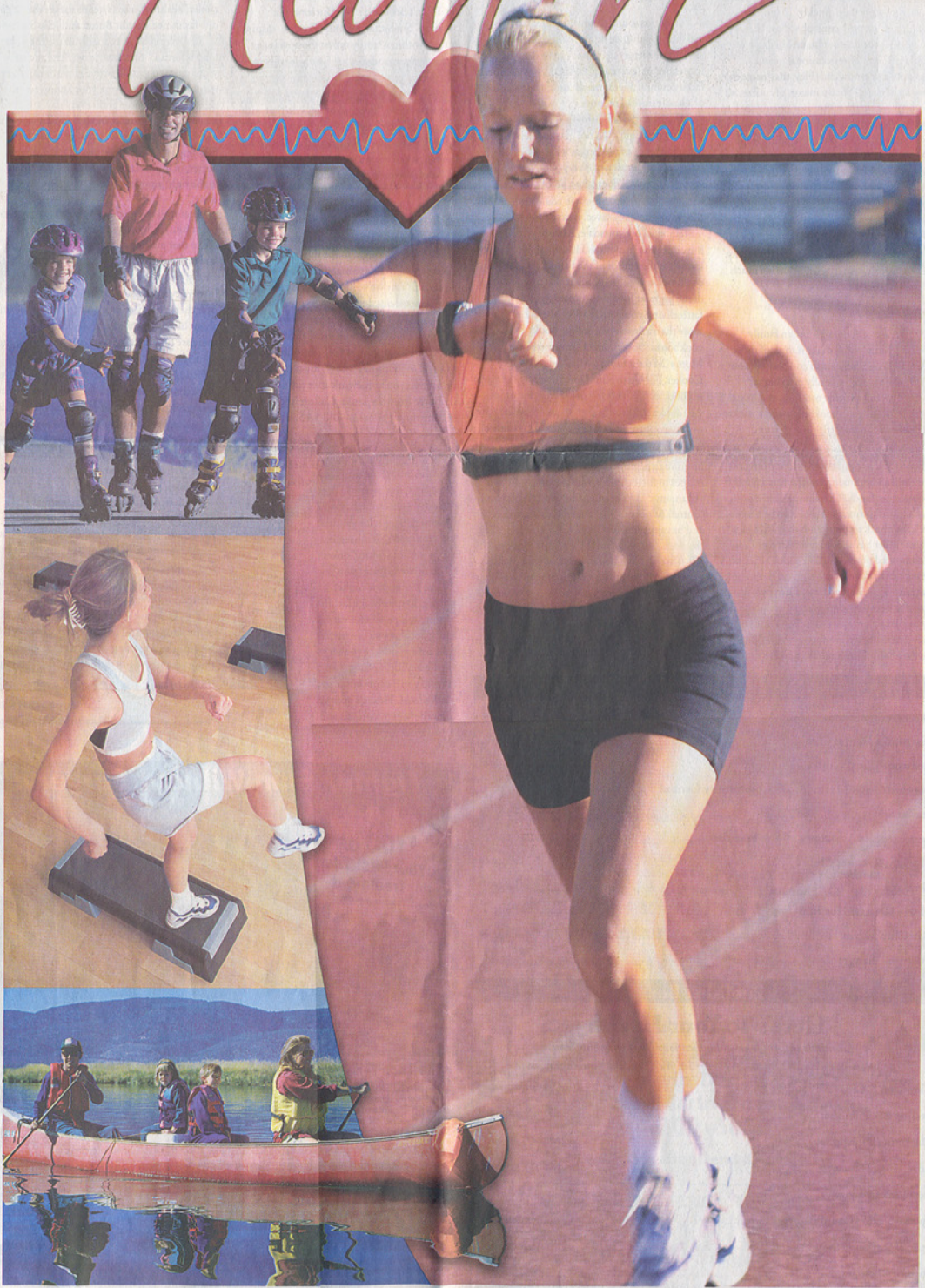
Here's to Your Health



Time for Dinner

The World's Healthiest Mom shares a few tips on getting your busy family to start eating right

Special to the Marin IJ
By David Templeton

If my immediate family is an accurate example of the norm—and my exhaustive research tells me that it is—then the average American family today barely has enough time to eat a meal let alone relax and enjoy it. Between jobs, school, errands, housework, and various extracurricular activities, planning, preparing, and serving dinner has become a feat of heroic proportions. Consequently, we have gravitated toward meals that can be whipped up quickly. This means that without strict self-control, we could easily end up eating nothing but macaroni and cheese, toaster waffles, and the occasional peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich. (Hey, they're quick, and we all like 'em.) Such a menu, of course, is, ahem, a bit less than healthy, but experience has shown me that making healthy balanced meals takes significantly longer than slapping some cheese between two pieces of buttered wonder bread and frying it to a nice golden brown. I can make a grilled cheese in less than four minutes, and with a can of raspberry peaches, a couple of pieces of peppered beef jerky, and a glass of milk, it can even be justified as representing all four food groups. (I'm kidding about the Beef Jerky. I'd never serve that for dinner. Spam is a much better dinner food).

But where were we?

Oh yes.

How in the world does a modern family manage to eat right and make it to all of those appointments and rehearsals and play-offs on time? How does such a family even begin?

"First step, call a family meeting, and bring along a couple of good cookbooks and a package of stickies," suggests nutrition expert and cookbook author Jyl Steinback. "Go through the cookbooks and present the idea that from now on, you will all be making an effort, as a family, to eat healthier foods. Then have everyone put stickies on the recipes that look the best to them." Steinback recommends that after each family member has chosen several recipes, and then compared notes, you take a look to identify those recipes that are A. healthy and B. can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. Then pare it all down to between seven and ten recipes that everyone likes. "Let every member of the family choose the menu for one or two nights," she counsels, adding, "If they have a favorite meal, be it chili or spaghetti or whatever, there's nothing wrong with having that meal once a week. So make a schedule and fill it up with healthy dinner ideas, one for each night of the week. From that day on," Steinback says, "your family will try to make sure that you always have the staple ingredients to make those meals on hand in your kitchen. Make a practice of stocking your pantry and your refrigerator so that you always have everything you need for those ten or fifteen basic meals. As soon as you learn how to stock your refrigerator and pantry, then everything gets easier."

If all of this sounds like a whole lot of time-consuming advance prep, Steinback insists that all of these dietary decisions can be decided upon in an hour or less, and from then on, with a bit of family commitment, meals should become less of a hassle instead of more.

"When people are rushed and they haven't planned well, and, 'Oh no!' its suddenly dinner time, the kinds of meals that will be thrown together are almost never very good for us," she says. "Eating well does take a bit of planning, but when you do that planning in advice, you'll find that you've actually saved yourself a lot of time."

Steinback, of Scottsdale, Arizona, is frequently introduced as "America's Healthiest Mom." Best known as the author of the Family Fit Lifestyle cookbook series, Steinback is also the creator of the popular food-and-fitness website www.fatfreeliving.com. Since 1993, she has authored more than a dozen best-selling books and cookbooks (Supermarket Gourmet, The Busy Mom's 'Make it From a Mix,' Busy Mom's Slow Cooker, Fill Up to Slim Down), selling over two million copies to health-conscious consumers. As a cookbook creator, Steinback's focus has been on developing meals for busy modern families. With such families in mind, she has whipped up enough healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes to fill the menus of a hundred four-star restaurants. She's been featured in Ladies' Home Journal, Woman's World, and Self Magazine, and has appeared on CNN, CBS This Morning, the Leeza Show, and HGTV's Smart Soutions. With her website, books, and constant public appearances, Steinback has become a Pied-Piper of low-fat eating, spreading smart, informative tidbits regarding diet, nutrition, exercise, lifestyle balance wherever she goes.

"When I first start someone out on a nutrition program," she says, "I always have them give me their ten favorite foods, and then we build their new healthy lifestyle around those ten favorite foods. Because, if the person is a potato person, I can't take potatoes out of their diet or they're never going to stick to the lifestyle change. Same with melted cheese sandwiches,"

Cheese sandwiches? Oh no! I've been found out!

"There are plenty of healthy ways to do a cheese sandwich," Steinback says, "from using reduced fat, market brand cheese—many of which are really very good—to using something like I Can't Believe It's Not Butter in the cooking." Such changes can, of course, inspire mutiny within a family unless those changes are properly introduced. If family members seem likely to balk at the notion of "low fat cheese," Steinback suggests having a low-fat cheese taste test. "Every so often, I do that with energy bars," she laughs. "I'm a big believer in energy bars because I do a lot of traveling. Every so often, when there are a bunch of new flavors and kinds on the market, I educate the family on reading the labels, and then we taste them all and compare. When you do that, you'll usually find at least one kind of energy bar or cheese that the family will actually discover they like."

Let's return, though, to the subject of not having enough time to make a balanced, healthy dinner. Let's say we've had our family meeting, we've selected our dozen or so favorite healthy meals, and we've packed our pantry with all the stuff needed to cook those meals. Even then, if I get home from work at 5:45, my wife doesn't get in till 6:30 (if she's lucky), my daughter is cramming on homework after riding the bus home from the Junior College and not walking through the door till 5:15, and we all have appointments, or classes, or rehearsals or meetings beginning at about 7:30—how in the world can we make a decent meal and eat it before charging back into the world. With the scenario just described, none of us are in the house together for longer than 30 minutes.

In such cases, Steinback has a two-word suggestion, and it isn't "slow down."

The two words are "slow cooker."

"I'm a major slow cooker fan," she says. "Slow cooking, in spite of the fact that it has the word 'slow' in it, is perfect for the fast-paced, busy family, because you can prepare everything the night before, put the cooker in the refrigerator, and then in the morning just take it out and plug it is, and you'll come home to a fully-cooked healthy meal. This has been great for my family."

Another obvious quick-and-healthy meal is, of course, the ever-popular salad. Steinback is a firm believer in the creative employment of salads as part or all of a healthy dinner or lunch'

"I subscribe to the Salad a Day school of thinking," she laughs. "It doesn't matter whether it's a salad at lunch, or a salad at dinner, there are so many good things that can be slipped into a salad that make them a very important part of a meal, and it's so easy to dress them up to make them fun and special. Caesar salads are a favorite in our house, but we change it around each time. You can have a chicken Caesar or a fish Caesar."

And when push comes to shove, few foods are tastier, healthier, and faster to maker than a good old-fashioned Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich.

"PBJ's are good for you, if you use the right kind of bread," Steinback says, "and there are so many good tasting whole grain breads today it's not hard to make sure your family gets the right shares of whole grain every day, and if you make sure you're using moderation in how much peanut butter and jelly you put on, not just mashing it on, but using moderation. Peanut butter, in moderation, is the kind of fat that, in the right amounts, is actually good for the body."

What it all comes down to, the Healthy Mom points out, is figuring out how to set up your life so that making healthy dinners is easier, and one way to do that is to involve the whole family. Shopping, Steinback believes, should involve everyone so they feel some "ownership" over their dietary choices, and feel more creative about building healthy meals. To that end, there are fun, creative ways to involve even the youngest kids.

Fitting better meals into your schedule isn't just a time-management issue, of course. There's also the little problem of convincing your kids to go along with the big junk-food to good-food lifestyle change. Steinback recommends using a bit of clever psychology to get them to forego some of their cookies and candy for fruits and vegetables.

"Fresh fruits and vegetables are what I call 'Grab Food,'" she says. "It's the food that right there, ready to grab when you open your refrigerator door. So what I try to do is get the fresh vegetables—the broccoli, and the carrots and the dip—and the fresh fruits—apples, and oranges and everything, already washed and ready—and have them right there at the front of the refrigerator. That's one of my best secrets, because the first thing we see is often the first thing we grab, so put the healthy stuff right up front."

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Cooking Healthy
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Next is the matter of timing. According to Steinback, the best time to feed healthy foods to a kid is right after school.

"They tend to come home hungry," she says, "and whatever is put in front of them, they will probably eat. That's when I try to make sure I have those grab foods ready, and also what I call sneak foods. Right after school they will be so hungry they won't think twice, they'll eat the healthy stuff. Then, you won't be under so much pressure to serve a super-healthy dinner, because you already know they've eaten their share of vegetables."

Another way to sneak fruits and vegetables into your kids' diets without them making too much of a fuss is to make a habit of serving fresh fruit smoothies. Undeniably good for you, they've also become extremely popular over the last few years. It's hard to visit a mall these days without finding a smoothie counter somewhere between the burger-on-a-stick place and the sticky cinnamon pretzel stand.

"For breakfast, we always have a smoothie," Steinback says. "Or you can do that after school, too. A smoothie has lots of fruit and juice, a lot of calcium that comes with the yogurt, and then whatever kind of protein powder you use—so your family is getting a lot of what's good for them, usually without them ever even knowing it. My kids like the taste and they have fun making them, so what could be better?"

Summing up then, the transition from junky foods to healthier foods is far from impossible; it just requires a bit of commitment, a few clever tricks here and there, some first-rate cookbooks, and a little bit of planning. Over her career, Steinback has seen numerous families make the switch, and has seen that such a change affects more than just the dietary health of the family.

"The nice thing about all of this," she says, "is that when you've planned out your meals, and stocked your kitchen and scheduled what your going to eat, then things suddenly run very smoothly around mealtime. There's no more tension or stress, and everybody's happy because they were all a part of deciding what to eat. In the end, making yourself and your family happier and healthier is a very good, and very attainable goal."

For more information visit Jyl Steinback's website: AmericasHealthiestMom.com.

Low-Fat dishes the family will love

Pork Tenderloin with Cranberry Sauce

Easy-Do Ahead • Serves 6

2 lb. pork tenderloin
3 tbsp. light brown sugar
1 ½ tsp. garlic powder
16-oz. can whole-berry cranberry sauce
3 tbsp. lemon juice
¼ cup dijon mustard

Sprinkle port tenderloin with garlic powder. Combine lemon juice, mustard, brown sugar, and cranberry sauce in a medium bowl and mix well. Spread mixture evenly over pork tenderloin and place in slow cooker. Pour any remaining sauce over the top. Cover and cook on Low 8 to 10 hours or on High 4 to 5 hours.

NUTRITION FACTS PER SERVING:
366 calories • 6.7 g fat (16%) • 43 g carbohydrates • 34 g protein • 108 mg cholesterol
1g dietary fiber • 252 mg sodium

EXCHANGES:
2 fruits • 1 other carb • 4 lean meats

CARB CHOICES: 3

Fresh pork's new and improved nutritional profile makes it an exceptional source of many essential vitamins and minerals.

Excerpt recipe from Jyl Steinbeck's *"Countertop Magician"*.

Portobello Rice Pilaf

Easy-Do Ahead • Serves 6

¾ cup wild rice
½ cup long grain brown rice
½ lb. portobello mushrooms, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 10 ¾ -oz. can low-fat cream of mushroom soup
½ cup nonfat chicken broth
1 cup water
¼ tsp. pepper

Spray inside of slow cooker with cooking spray. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and mix well. Cover and cook on low heat for 6-7 hours or high heat for 3-3 ½ hours.

NUTRITION FACTS PER SERVING:
169 calories • 1.5 g total fat • 1 mg cholesterol • 275 mg sodium • 34 g carbohydrates
2 g fiber • 7 g protein

EXCHANGES
1 vegetable • 2 starch

CARB CHOICES: 2

Excerpt recipe from Jyl Steinbeck's *"The Busy Mom's Slow Cooker Cookbook"*.

Cream Chicken and Wild Rice Soup

One Dish Meal • Average-Do Ahead • Serves 4

2 cups nonfat chicken broth, divided
½ cup chopped onion
2 cups low-fat chicken tenders, cooked and cut in 1-inch pieces
1 cup chopped celery
1 cup nonfat sour cream
½ cup flour
2 cups skim milk
½ tsp. pepper
2 tbsp. chopped green onions
2 cups cooked wild rice

Spray large saucepan or Dutch oven with cooking spray; add 1 ½ teaspoons chicken broth and heat over medium-high heat. Add onion and celery; cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are slightly softened (about 4 to 6 minutes). Reduce heat to medium; gradually stir in flour and pepper. Add remaining chicken broth and cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil and thickens. Boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Stir in cooked rice, chicken, sour cream, and milk; cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until soup is thick and creamy (if you want a thinner consistency, add more milk or chicken broth). Garnish with green onions before servig (serves 4).

NUTRITION FACTS PER SERVING
320 calories: • 1g total fat (3%) • 39 g carbohydrate • 72 mg cholesterol
2g dietary fiber • 2 ½ carbohydrate choice • 36 g protein • 796 mg sodium

EXCHANGES
½ milk • 3 ½ very lean meat • 2 starch

Wild rice contains twice as much protein as white rice and is high in B complex vitamins.

Excerpt recipe from Jyl Steinbeck's *"Super Foods. Cook Your Way To Health"*.

More recipes on page 9

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San Marin Dental Care

New solutions to restore your youthful smile

Written by Sun Costigan, DDS
Fellow, Academy of General Dentistry

Let's talk about your teeth, your smile and your overall well-being. When we were younger, we didn't think too much about the condition of our teeth, after all, we were invincible. Well, as we aged, many changes occurred. If we didn't take excellent care of our teeth, cavities had to be filled, some teeth were lost and we became embarrassed about our smiles. We also began to have problems with our uncomfortable dentures, painful partials, or loose plates. There are now ways to restore your beautiful smile comfortably and at the same time, correct those bothersome dental issues many of us tolerate because we were not aware of today's comfortable and affordable solutions.

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Functional Foods:

Not As Mother Nature Intended

By Tresa Erickson

Calcium-enriched, fortified, enhanced. These are just some of the terms that describe a growing number of foods that have been labeled functional. Introduced in Japan in the late '80s, functional foods contain ingredients that manufacturers claim provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition. Americans spend millions of dollars on functional foods every year. But how effective are they and why are they so appealing?

Functional foods are divided into two categories, unmodified foods that contain natural ingredients that boost health and modified foods that are enhanced with specific nutrients, phytochemicals or herbs to improve health. Some examples of unmodified functional foods include oatmeal, which has proven to naturally lower cholesterol, and dairy products, which have proven to naturally lower the risk of osteoporosis. Examples of modified foods are numerous, including calcium-enriched orange juice and fortified cereals. While there's little doubt that unmodified foods benefit health, the effectiveness of modified foods is questionable.

In spite of claims like "boosts memory, strengthens the immune system and improves energy levels," many modified foods have not been documented to benefit health. That's because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not require such generic claims to be scientifically proven. Only claims that mention a specific condition, such as heart disease or cancer, must be backed by scientific research. A modified food that claims to boost memory may or may not do so. Even it does, the other ingredients in the food may make it detrimental to health. A memory-enhancing cookie, for example, may be loaded with calories, fat and sugar.

Another problem with modified foods is the type of functional ingredients they contain. Some may have herbs, which are not regulated and therefore may not have been tested by the manufacturer to see what, if any, risks are associated with them. Some herbs have been scientifically proven to cause cancer, birth effects and more. Experts warn consumers against buying modified foods enhanced with herbs.

There is still much to learn about the effectiveness of functional foods as a whole. In spite of this, many consumers fall prey to the claims made on the labels and buy them. The reasons functional foods have become popular vary. Advances in science and agriculture have made the production of functional foods abundant. Less restrictive regulation of functional foods has made giving them enticing labels somewhat easy. These reasons, combined with widespread media coverage expelling mounting scientific evidence that diet can reduce the occurrence and progression of some diseases, have turned many consumers onto functional foods. Those looking to improve their health and avoid the rising costs of health care may be attracted to the enticing labels on functional foods and buy them, while those interested in self-healing may purchase them to cure a certain ailment.

As the senior population grows and the average lifespan increases, the demand for functional foods will compound as people look to them as a way to stay healthy. More and more functional foods will come on the market, and hopefully, the regulation of them will expand. Until then, it's important to note that the overall effectiveness of functional foods, in particular modified foods, is still in question. As a result, functional foods should be consumed in moderation.

Functional foods are not guaranteed health boosters. The best way to improve health is to eat a balanced diet, stay active and see a doctor for regular checkups.

Recipes

Continued from page 4

3-Step Minestrone Meal

Easy-Do Ahead • Serves 6

3 ½ cups nonfat chicken broth
28 oz. can Italian style diced tomatoes
10 oz frozen green peas
1 cup uncooked pasta (macaroni, shells, etc.)
1 lb. fresh spinach leaves, washed and dried
19 oz can white beans, rinsed and drained
nonfat Parmesan cheese (optional)

Combine chicken broth and tomatoes (with juice) in large soup pot or Dutch oven; bring to a boil over high heat. Add peas and pasta; reduce heat to medium and cook 7 to 9 minutes until pasta is tender. Stir in spinach leaves and beans; cook over medium-high heat until spinach leaves wilt and soup is heated through. If soup is too thick, add water or chicken broth and heat through. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese before serving, if desired.

NUTRITION FACTS PER SERVING:
244 calories • 1 g total fat (4%) • 48 g carbohydrate • 0 mg cholesterol
3 g dietary fiber • 14 g protein • 928 mg sodium

EXCHANGES:
2 starch • 3 vegetable

CARBOHYDRATE CHOICE: 3

Green peas provide vitamin A, folic acid, potassium, protein, and fiber.

Excerpt recipe from Jyl Steinbeck's *"Super Foods. Cook Your Way To Health"*.

Hot Tamales

Easy - Do Ahead • Serves: 6

1 lb. Laura's extra lean ground beef (4% fat) *(or ask butcher for equivalent)*
1 packet chili seasoning mix
1 tsp. Mrs. Dash seasoning
1 tsp. garlic powder
16-oz. can chopped tomatoes with green chiles
1 tsp. onion powder
¾ cup cornmeal
2 (11-oz.) cans corn kernels, drained
¾ cup evaporated skim milk
2 ¼-oz. can sliced black olives
¾ cup water
1 cup nonfat shredded cheddar cheese
¼ cup egg substitute

Spray nonstick skillet with cooking spray and heat over medium-high heat. Add ground beef to skillet; season with garlic and onion powders and cook, stirring frequently, until meat is crumbly and cooked through. Combine cornmeal, milk, water, and egg substitute in a bowl and mix until blended. Add ground beef, chili seasoning mix, Mrs. Dash seasoning, tomatoes, corn, and olives; toss until ingredients are mixed. Spoon into slower cooker; cover and cook on High 3 to 4 hours or on Low 6 to 8 hours. Sprinkle cheese over top; cover and heat until cheese is melted.

NUTRITION FACTS PER SERVING:
315 calories • 5.9g fat (17%) • 37 g carbohydrates • 27g protein • 42 mg cholesterol
4 g dietary Fiber • 1,229 mg sodium

EXCHANGES:
3 lean meats • 1 ½ starches • 2 vegetables

CARB CHOICES 2

Tomatoes are a source of the antioxidant lycopene. A diet high in lycopene and other antioxidants has been found to reduce the risk of certain types of cancer.

Excerpt recipe from Jyl Steinbeck's *"Countertop Magicidan"*.

Naturally Nutritious

By Ronda Addy

Every year Americans consume more than 18 billion quarts of popped popcorn, approximately 56 quarts for every man, woman and child. Not only is popcorn a fun food to eat, but it is also good for you.

Popcorn is low in calories, with only 31 to 55 calories in one cup of unbuttered popcorn and only 133 calories if lightly buttered. Popcorn is sugar free, has no artificial preservatives and contains carbohydrates that produce energy. One of the best things about popcorn is that it can be enjoyed as a snack but won't spoil your appetite.

There are two different colors of popcorn: yellow, which pops larger and is usually what you find at the theater, and white, which has a better flavor and is more tender. Bars and hotels usually serve the white.

While popcorn is good for you and relatively inexpensive, there is a trick to popping it to perfection:

• Warm the popper or skillet first. Add 1/4 cup of cooking oil to the pan. Any cooking oil will do, but corn or sunflower oil has less calories. Butter will burn, so don't use it. Allow the oil to heat—the best temperature is between 400 and 460 degrees. If the oil smokes, it is too hot.

• Drop a kernel or two into the oil as a test. When the kernel pops or spins, you can add the rest. Put in just enough kernels to cover the bottom of the pan. Make sure all the kernels are covered with oil.

• If your popcorn does not pop into fluffy, crunchy kernels, it may have lost some moisture. Unpopped kernels are called "old maids." They don't have enough water in the starch to create the buildup of pressure needed to pop. You can revive your popcorn by adding one tablespoon of water to a one-quart jar filled 3/4 with popcorn. Cover and shake the jar every five to 10 minutes until the water has been absorbed. Wait two to four days before popping.

Once you have your corn popped, consider these recipes:

Five-Spice Popcorn

2 1/2 quarts popped popcorn
1 cup Chow Mein noodles, optional
1/2 cup peanuts
1/3 cup peanut oil
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon five spice powder
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon sesame salt or salt
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/8 teaspoon sugar

Keep popcorn, noodles and peanuts warm. Combine remaining ingredients and mix thoroughly. Slowly pour over popcorn mixture, tossing to blend. Pour into a large roasting pan. Heat in a 300-degree oven for five to 10 minutes, stirring once.

Yield: 2 1/2 quarts

Boston Tea Party Popcorn

2 1/2 quarts popped popcorn
1/4 cup melted butter
2 tablespoons instant lemon-flavored ice tea mix
1 tablespoon sugar

Put the freshly popped popcorn in a large bowl. Drizzle butter over it and toss. Combine tea and sugar. Add to buttered popcorn and toss again.

Yield: 2 1/2 quarts