

Grill and chill: savor flavor with smart, healthy swaps

Warming temperatures mean it's time to fire up the grill. But Lexi Fitzgerald, a clinical dietitian who counsels patients at OSF HealthCare, says you should strike a balance between tasty and healthy.

First things first – some good news: finding that balance doesn't mean cutting out your favorite foods *entirely*. Moderation is key. After all, grilling is as much about eating as it is socializing. And you don't want to be miserable.

"We want to add things to your diet and not take things away," Fitzgerald says. "If you take everything away and go cold turkey, it's going to start cravings. You're going to eventually want to have it and probably binge on it."

Some healthy options

- For meat like steak or cheeseburgers, pay attention to the label when shopping.

"The most important thing is to look at the fat content. Try to do at least 90-10 to get less saturated fat. We don't want that if you have heart disease, high cholesterol or anything like that," Fitzgerald says.

The 90-10 is referring to the lean vs. fat marking on the label. So, look for "90% lean – 10% fat."

Turkey burgers are also an alternative to traditional burgers. Chicken is also a leaner meat.

- Choose beef hot dogs over pork dogs. Compare brands to find one that's lower in sodium.
- Set sail! Salmon, cod or tuna are healthy choices, Fitzgerald says.
- You can grill vegetables as a side dish.

"[Put them in] a foil packet. Add some olive oil, salt, pepper and whatever seasonings you want," Fitzgerald suggests. "Zucchinis, peppers, onions and corn are all really great options."

Fitzgerald says you can also add those vegetables to a salad. And try not to load up your sides with condiments like butter.

A guide to plates

How should my plate look? Fitzgerald, along with many other diet experts, point to the [MyPlate](#) guidelines from the United States Department of Agriculture. Protein, grains, fruit and vegetables make up a quarter of your plate each, with a dairy product (a glass of milk, for example) on the side. It's the modern take on the food pyramid you might have learned in school.

"We don't expect perfection," Fitzgerald reassures. "Eighty percent fantastic and 20% not so great is great in my book. As long as you're trying to be mindful about what you're putting on your plate. Make sure you're making those switches to leaner meats, choosing whole grains at least half the time and adding fruits and vegetables."

"I still eat brownies and cookies. It's not a bad thing to do that whatsoever," she adds with a smile.

A guide to making changes

It might be tough to eat less comfort food. Fitzgerald says to be deliberate about it.

"We always recommend trying to make one small change at a time," Fitzgerald says. "Try to switch from regular soda to diet soda. Try that once a day and see how you like it. Once you feel comfortable with that change, move on to the next one."

"Take it slow," she adds. "Make sure it's going to be sustainable for you long-term."