



November 2020 Newsletter

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Food Bowl Meals

By Sheila Gains, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Arapahoe County



What is a food bowl meal and how can it become a new favorite in your house?

Restaurants have discovered that food bowls are a great way to offer customers a wide variety of choices and flexibility. Customers choose from a variety of prepared foods to layer in their bowl. This means the chef does not need to make custom meals; every dish is essentially a custom order. This same concept, if used in your home, can meet the needs and tastes of many family members.

I first discovered the beauty of food bowl meals when trying to plan the menu for a family get-together of 16 people with varying food restrictions. I could not find one dish that was gluten free, vegan, low carb, and free of mushrooms, eggplant and lemon (all allergens of family members). My solution was offering a variety of separate foods that people could mix and match in their own bowl.

I have discovered that food bowls are a healthy, simple and affordable way to serve either a small family meal or a larger dinner party.

Plan your food bowl options around a few choices of each food type; base, protein, vegetable and sauce. Adding a topping or two is optional, but an appreciated added touch.

Base – Give people a choice of a cooked grain, noodle or chopped fresh greens. Options include:

- Cooked rice, brown rice, quinoa, barley, wheat berry or bulgur
- Cooked noodles or pasta
- If someone is watching their carbohydrates, offer a base of chopped fresh greens such as kale, Swiss chard or lettuce



Protein - Have two protein choices that complement the sauces you are serving. Examples include:

- Beans/legumes or lentils, cooked or canned (rinsed and drained)
- Tofu (soybean curd) or tempeh
- Meat (beef, pork, lamb or poultry), cooked
- Fish/seafood, cooked
- Eggs, cooked (hard boiled, scrambled or fried)

Vegetables – The sky is the limit on vegetable choices. Let people pick from both familiar favorites and “new to them” vegetables. Try cooking or serving them in a new way:

- Steamed, baked, grilled, roasted, or raw
- Sliced, diced or grated

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Sauce – Have at least two sauce choices. These can be homemade or straight from a jar or bottle. Salsa and soy sauce are usually served cold. Others, like spaghetti or cheese sauce, are served hot. Let your choices take you around the world with flavors. Consider sauces from Asia, Mexico, Caribbean, South America, Africa, Europe, etc.

Toppings – Chopped herbs, grated cheese, seeds, fried noodles, etc. add flavor and/or crunch.



Let's Talk

Who does not like choices? Children are no exception. Let them help you decide what foods to offer. There are many jobs children can do to help prepare meals. From rinsing fresh vegetables to tearing lettuce or measuring rice, there can be a job for everyone. Helping prepare foods often encourages children to try/taste new foods. Helping also makes them feel valued and teaches many skills such as measuring and following directions.

Recipe for Health – Food Bowl Ideas

Here is an example of a few food bowl components that can be mixed and matched into three or more meal choices, such as: Mexican burrito bowl, Mediterranean salad bowl, or an Asian inspired rice bowl.

Base:

1. Rice, cooked
2. Salad greens, raw, chopped

Protein:

1. Chicken, cooked and shredded
2. Garbanzo beans, from a can (rinsed and drained)

Vegetable:

1. Tomatoes, raw, diced
2. Carrots, raw, grated
3. Zucchini, cooked or raw, sliced or diced



Sauce:

1. Salsa, favorite brand of fresh or jarred, for a Mexican burrito bowl flavor
2. Salad dressing, Balsamic or red wine salad dressing, for a Mediterranean salad bowl
3. Mixture of equal parts soy sauce and Thai sweet chili sauce makes for a Asian inspired option

Optional Toppings:

1. Grated cheddar cheese
2. Crumbled feta cheese
3. Crunchy Chow Mein noodles

The beauty of serving food components instead of a composed dish is that everyone can have a custom meal. Food bowls offer tasty and nutritious choices for families.

Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods...