

Extension

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Newsletter

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Slice of Health...A Healthier Way to Look at & Make Pizza

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Sometimes pizza gets a bad rap for being junk food. When you carefully select the toppings or make it yourself, pizza can be a very healthy option for a snack or a meal. Pizza can contain all of the food groups in a single slice. It can contain whole grains, vegetables, fruit, lean meat and low fat cheese. Whole grain crust can be hard to find in restaurants or at the store so you may need to make your own. With our whole wheat recipe you can have pizza dough ready in 45 minutes and serve fresh, home baked pizza in about 1 hour. It is more work to make your own dough, but the benefit of being able to control the salt and increase the fiber can be worth the effort. And the flavor is incredible.

Healthy Choices: Just as adults, children love to make choices about their food. Be sure to include children in the making of homemade pizza. Instead of making one or two large pizzas for the family, divide the dough into smaller pieces. Let everyone in the family create their own- custom pizza(s).

Toppings: Get creative with your topping combinations. Don't just think of traditional Italian combinations. Borrow flavors from Mexican, African, Mediterranean or Asian dishes to develop a great tasting pizza.

Sauce: Store bought tomato based pizza sauces are loaded with great nutrition, are low in fat, and packed with flavor, but are high in sodium. Look at the nutrition label and use one with lower sodium. Better yet, make your own with low sodium tomato sauce and dried or fresh herbs and spices like, garlic, oregano, basil, etc. Other sauces could include, salsa thickened with a little tomato paste, olive oil with your choice of herbs and spices mixed in, pesto sauce or a little low-fat white (Alfredo) sauce .

Vegetables: Consider onions, peppers, chili, zucchini, fresh thinly sliced tomatoes, fresh spinach, olives, mushrooms, asparagus, green peas, green beans, artichokes, just to name a few. Vegetables add flavor, fiber and nutrients to pizza. Some vegetables should be cooked (artichoke, green beans) or partially cooked (asparagus) before added to pizza. Precooking some vegetables might be needed because the short baking time would not be enough time to soften them. Another reason to pre-cook them is because the water they release during cooking could make the pizza soggy.

Fruit: Most people are familiar with pineapple on the classic Hawaiian pizza, so why not try, chopped figs, thinly sliced peaches, pears or apricots. A little sweet fruit in combination with a slightly salty meat or cheese is appetizing.

Herbs and spices: Experiment with herbs and spices to find the perfect combination to enhance the flavor of other ingredients.

Meat: Look for low fat meat options, such as turkey pepperoni or sausage. Cook sausage and ground meats, draining well to remove as much fat as possible. Shred, dice or thinly slice cooked chicken, turkey, shrimp, Canadian bacon or lean ham.

Cheese: Most children prefer the mild taste of mozzarella or mild cheddar cheese. Many adults like to kick it up a notch. Look for lower fat cheese options such as part skim mozzarella, cheese made with part skim milk or 2% milk fat. Use less of a strong flavored or sharp cheese, such as feta, parmesan or blue cheese.

Let's Talk

Children will not need much convincing to help you make custom pizzas. In this activity children can get creative and feel in control. Gently request they pick toppings from at least two or three food groups (vegetable, fruit, meat/protein, and cheese/milk). The crust represents the grain group.

Recipe for Health: Whole Wheat Pizza Dough

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups warm water (100 degrees F)
- 1 package dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 3 cups whole wheat flour
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 Vitamin C tablet (500 mg), finely crushed (acts as a dough conditioner)

Directions:

1. In a 2 cup measuring bowl, dissolve yeast and honey in warm water. Let mixture stand 10 minutes, until foamy.
2. Stir olive oil and salt into yeast mixture.
3. Mixing it all together:
 - a. Measure flours into a food processor, add crushed Vitamin C. With the machine running, pour the yeast mixture through the feed tube. Run processor until it forms a ball of dough.
OR
 - b. Measure flours into a large bowl, add crushed Vitamin C. Pour yeast mixture over flour mixture, stir and knead until it forms a ball of dough.
4. Move dough to a lightly floured board or counter. Knead 50-60 strokes, using as little flour as possible.
5. Lightly coat a large bowl with olive oil, place dough in bowl and turn over to oil the top. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place for 30 minutes, or until double in size.
6. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Punch down dough and roll it out to fit your pan. For a soft crust, add sauce and other toppings as desired and bake for 15-20 minutes. For a crispier crust, bake the rolled out dough without toppings for 5-8 minutes, remove from oven and add toppings, return to oven and bake an additional 12 to 15 minutes or until the toppings are hot and cheese is melted.



Recipe makes enough dough for 8-10 small (individual crusts) or 2, 12-14 inch round medium thick crusts, or 2, 10 X 14 inch rectangle thin crusts.