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Get Grilling with Healthy Options this Summer

Nothing says “summer” better than cutting open a watermelon and firing up the grill. Grilling can be an easy way to prepare delicious and healthy meals.

For healthy grilling, use lean cuts of meat and poultry, trimming any visible fat before cooking. Preparing meats and poultry on the grill allows excess fat to drip away, and rarely does extra fat, like butter, need to be added to grilled foods.

One way to tenderize tougher cuts of meat is with a marinade. A good marinade requires three basic ingredients:

1. **An acid ingredient to tenderize the meat:** lemon or lime juice, wine, vinegar, or yogurt work well, as do tomatoes, balsamic vinegar, and soy sauce.
2. **Herbs and spices to add flavor and zest.** Try using garlic, red pepper flakes, green onions, rosemary, thyme, onion, or ginger.
3. **Time.** Marinating times vary greatly depending on the kind, cut, and size of the meat. Denser meats like pork and steak can marinate for 24 hours or even longer. Lighter meats like chicken can marinate between 2 hours and 24 hours. Seafood and vegetable marinating times range from 15 to 60 minutes.

Many people may not be as familiar with grilling fish as they are with meat and poultry. Fish is very simple to grill - place it on a piece of aluminum foil large enough to wrap the fish, add a little olive oil and a variety of seasonings, such as basil leaves or oregano, wrap the foil around the fish, and place it on the grill.

Be careful what you use for flavoring— many seasoning mixes are high in sodium. Try salt-free seasoning mixes or add your own dried herbs and spices such as cilantro, curry powder, garlic, ginger, dry mustard, rosemary, and thyme.

For best results when grilling fruits and vegetables, choose those that are ripe and ready to eat. Always wash and dry produce before grilling. Before cooking, brush fruits and vegetables lightly with oil, melted butter, or a marinade to help prevent sticking.

Almost any vegetable can be grilled. However, different vegetables need different cooking times, depending on their size and their moisture content. Vegetables such as asparagus, broccoli, onion slices, pepper chunks, summer squash, and tomatoes usually cook in about five to seven minutes. Root vegetables like potatoes, beets, and winter squash may take 20 to 45 minutes to cook, depending on whether they are whole, sliced, or cut into pieces.

When grilling fruits, slice the fruit in half and remove any pits and/or cores. Begin by grilling the pulp side down, turning as needed. In general, fruits take three to five minutes to cook. Bear in mind that fruit can easily burn due to its high sugar content, so watch it closely.

Source: Are you a Nutritious Grill Master? Nebraska Extension:
<http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g2048.pdf>

Source: Cami Wells, Educator – Food, Health, and Nutrition in Hall County.