



MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

I got a letter from a reader asking me to send all of the low-calorie microwave recipes that I have. I couldn't do that because I have hundreds of low-cal recipes. But I can tell this reader — and you — how to make your own microwave recipes lower in calories.

Fat is the big culprit. Cut a tablespoon of fat from a recipe and you eliminate about double the calories that you would by cutting out a tablespoon of sugar.

The fat content of main-dish microwave recipes is often lower than in a comparable conventional recipe. That's because fat isn't needed to prevent food from sticking to the pan, as when sauteing onion and green pepper for combination dishes, or micro-baking

fish filets. Often the amount of fat can be reduced even more, or entirely omitted from your favorite microwave casserole or one-dish meal.

Fat can be reduced by half in most microwave sauce recipes. Again, fat isn't needed to prevent sticking; it's mostly for flavor. When reducing fat, add herbs and spices for enhanced flavor. Sometimes oil in a salad dressing can be partly replaced by water, as was probably done in creating Sweet and Sour Vegetables (below). Cooking soups, stews, and other combination dishes ahead, chilling, and skimming off any hardened fat before reheating is another way to lower calories.

Starting with lower-fat ingredients also makes a big difference

in total calories. Use extra-lean for micro-stir frying. Choose center-cut pork chops instead of pork steak, top-round beef steak instead of sirloin. Trim off visible fat before cooking. Choose chicken or turkey breast instead of higher-fat legs, thighs or assorted pieces. Remove skin from poultry before cooking.

Get to know foods — which ones are low in fat and calories and which aren't. Read labels to find out ingredient contents. Here are two examples of how reading labels pays off. Low-fat yogurt is not all the same. Read the label to see if it's made with skim milk or 2-percent milk. Then choose the kind made with skim milk, or choose a nonfat variety. Some fats are better for you than others. Read labels and choose foods containing soybean or corn oils, rather than saturated palm or coconut oils.

Check past "Microwave Minutes" columns. Many of the recipes I've shared in the past years have been low-calorie. When a recipe isn't, look it over and you may be able to change ingredients to suit your diet.

Several years ago, I decided to include a nutritional analysis of each recipe. This is so you have an

idea of the nutrients you'll get from eating a specific amount of a recipe. As in any diet or way of life, it's up to you to use the nutritional information to your advantage. If a luscious-sounding dessert is high in fat, you may want to make it only when you have guests — lots of people to eat it up so there are no leftovers — and cut your piece only half-size. If a recipe calls for an ingredient that you know contains lots of whatever you don't want, substitute another ingredient. For example, if you're concerned about sodium, substitute a can of lower-salt tomato sauce for a can of regular, or low-sodium bouillon granules for a regular bouillon cube.

My nutritional recipe analysis is approximate and is a guide only. It is based on the latest nutritional statistics. Where two choices of ingredients or amounts are given, the first is used in the analysis. Optional ingredients — listed as "(optional)" — are not included in the analysis. Two-percent milk is used unless otherwise stated. Regular — not light, low-calorie, low-salt or low-fat — ingredients are used unless otherwise stated.

The following low-calorie recipes are from a new booklet, "Fast and Fit." The 29-page booklet offers two pages of quick tips for success in microwaving, a power level conversion chart, a sweetener conversion chart and 23 recipes including soups, main dishes, salads and desserts. The recipes call for Sweet 'N Low heat-stable sugar substitute and ingredients that represent reduced fat, calories or sodium. Each recipe includes only a caloric content. Both are tasty and colorful.

To order a copy of "Fast and Fit," send 75 cents for postage and handling to: Cumberland Packing Corp., 60 Flushing Avenue, Dept. PK, Brooklyn, NY 11205.

Sweet and Sour Vegetables (Salad)
 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
 1/2 cup water
 1/2 cup vegetable oil

2 cloves garlic, minced
 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
 1 tablespoon chopped fresh or 1 teaspoon dried basil
 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 1 packet Sweet 'N Low granulated sugar substitute
 1/3 teaspoon black pepper
 1/3 teaspoon salt (optional)
 1 small head cauliflower, separated into small flowerettes (about 1 pound)
 3 carrots, sliced diagonally into 1-inch pieces
 1 small onion, cut into rings
 1 yellow or green pepper, cut into 1-inch squares
 1 red pepper, cut into 1-inch squares
 1 can (8 1/4 ounces) garbanzo beans, drained
 4 green onions, sliced diagonally into 1-inch pieces.

In 3- to 4-quart microwave-safe casserole or bowl, combine vinegar, water, oil, garlic, parsley, basil, oregano, Sweet 'N Low, black pepper and salt. Add cauliflower, carrots, celery, onion and peppers. Mix well. Cover with lid or plastic wrap.

Microwave (High) 7 to 9 minutes, stirring once, or until vegetables are barely tender-crisp. Stir in garbanzo beans and green onion. Refrigerate several hours before serving. Makes about 10 (1 cup each) servings.

Each serving: 123 calories, 5g protein, 10g fat, 16g carbohydrate, 29 mg sodium, 0 cholesterol.

Questions for Joyce?
 Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, c/o Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903. Please include a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope.

Recipes in this column are tested in 600- to 650-watt microwave ovens. With an oven of different wattage output, timings may need slight adjustment.

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