

Activity 4: Heart Healthy Cooking Demonstrations

Cooking demonstrations can be an important part of group discussions. A cooking demonstration can show people how to prepare healthy foods that taste good. Most people like to eat, and they'll be interested in learning how to prepare food in a heart healthy way. Here's how to do a cooking demonstration.

Recruiting a Food Demonstration Facilitator

You don't have to conduct the food demonstration yourself. Instead, you can recruit a registered dietitian to do the cooking. Contact your local health department or county extension office. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (www.eatright.org/find-an-expert) lists registered dietitians in the United States.

Choosing the Facility

Here are some questions you need to ask before deciding where you'll hold the cooking demonstration.

- **What food does the facility permit?**

The facility may have restrictions concerning food. It may allow only prepared food, or it may not allow certain types of food. If food may be brought in for tasting but not cooking, you may have to bring a prepared dish. The type of food you can bring may be limited. Some organizations have special dietary restrictions. Find out beforehand. If you're doing a cooking demonstration at a festival or an outdoor fair, you may need a special permit to use cooking equipment. Be sure to visit the facilities before the day of the demonstration so you know what to expect!

- **Is water accessible?**

Having a sink in the same room as the demonstration is ideal. You'll need to wash your hands frequently. You may also need large amounts of water for the recipes.

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- **Is electricity accessible?**

If outlets aren't close to where you're giving your demonstration or if your demonstration is outside, bring heavy-duty extension cords. If there's no electricity available, you'll need a small generator.

- **Is lighting adequate?**

Make sure there's enough light for participants to see your demonstration.

- **Is the location convenient and accessible?**

Your location should be wheelchair accessible, preferably have parking, and be near public transportation.

- **Are tables and chairs available?**

You'll need at least one table. If your demonstration is fairly long, you'll need chairs for your audience.

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Choosing the Recipes

The recipes you choose depend on which principle of heart healthy cooking you want to show; the amount of time you have to prepare for and give the demonstration; and your budget, facility, and equipment. Be very familiar with your recipes and prepare them at least once before the demonstration.

For ideas about what to cook, see the recipes in the *With Every Heartbeat Is Life* manual. The “Strawberry-Banana Yogurt Parfait Recipe” below (page A.24) is simple and tasty.

▪ **What’s your message?**

If you want to demonstrate how to reduce the saturated fat in food, look for a vegetarian recipe, or a recipe that uses lean beef, skinless chicken, or low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk or milk products. If you want to demonstrate low-sodium cooking, look for recipes that use small amounts of salt, low-sodium ingredients, or lots of herbs and spices for flavor.

▪ **How much time do you have?**

If you don’t have much time before the demonstration, use recipes that require little preparation (chopping or slicing), or get ingredients that are already prepared. Find recipes that won’t take more time than you have for the demonstration and followup questions. Demonstrate the dish with the longest cooking time first, so all the food is ready as close to the same time as possible.

▪ **Demonstrate just one concept.**

If you don’t have the time or resources to demonstrate a whole recipe, consider demonstrating just one concept. For example, to demonstrate draining off fat:

- Open a can of soup and skim off the fat with a spoon.
- Brown ground beef in a skillet and carefully drain the fat into a cup or can.

▪ **Preparing in Advance**

Make a list of what you need to buy, including the food and tools. Shop for the food as close to the demonstration date as possible.

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Careful About Food Safety!

- **Wash your hands frequently using soap and warm water.** Wash your hands whenever you touch an unclean surface, raw meat, or any part of your body. Cover your mouth and nose if you cough or sneeze, and immediately wash your hands.
- **Keep all food that needs to be cold or frozen in a refrigerator or freezer before the demonstration.** When it's time to go to the demonstration, put the food in a cooler with ice or freezer packs and go directly to where you'll be cooking.
- **Wrap prepared dishes and ingredients tightly.** Don't let raw ingredients touch or run onto cooked ingredients. For example, keep raw meat, poultry, and fish separate from raw or cooked vegetables. Use separate utensils, bowls, and cutting boards for these foods. Wash all utensils and cutting boards in hot soapy water immediately after cutting raw ingredients.
- **Have a handy supply of wet paper towels to wipe up spills as they happen.** Cover your cooking area with a vinyl tablecloth so you can wipe up spills easily. Keep a trash can and recycling container nearby so you can easily toss in used items (such as empty cans and plastic wrap) and keep the table clear.
- **Make sure you are neat and clean.** Participants will be eating the food you're preparing. Consider wearing an apron and a hairnet or scarf while cooking.

Setting Up the Demonstration

- **Give yourself enough time.** Allow more time than you think you'll need for setup.
- **Arrange the room.** Make sure everyone can see and hear you. Check for access to electricity and water. Be sure all surfaces are clean.
- **Set up the food.** Shortly before you start, put out your food in the order you'll be preparing it. Group each recipe's food together.
- **Keep cool.**
 - If you forget an ingredient or a pot doesn't boil quickly enough, let your audience know.
 - Give them examples of ingredients that you could use in place of the one you forgot.
 - While the pot boils, talk about the changes you made to the recipe to make it more heart healthy.

Have fun!