

For example, replace saturated and trans fats—in butter and stick margarine, respectively—with the unsaturated fats found in canola oil. This oil is used in all six recipes in the collection because it has no trans fat (which contributes to heart disease), contains the least saturated fat of all common culinary oils, and is a good source of omega-3 fat.

The recipes also pack in vegetables to enhance nutritional benefits—they do this by making pesto out of kale, fries out of carrots and parsnips, “chips” from zucchini, and “pasta” from spaghetti squash. They also upgrade pasta and breads to whole grains. Such ingredient swaps keep calories and saturated fat in check while pumping up vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

Good nutrition today emphasizes what to add to your diet as opposed to what to subtract. The rule of thumb used to be “eat foods with less salt, less cholesterol, and less fat.” Now it’s more about eating foods with whole grains, plant proteins, lots of produce, and heart-smart fats.

Another way to make comfort foods better for you is with healthier cooking techniques, such as using a blender to thicken soup instead of heavy cream, or “bake-frying” to make food crispy without deep-frying (this technique is used in the chicken Parmigiana with spaghetti squash recipe.) Bake-frying involves misting food with canola oil and baking it in a hot oven for great texture without heaviness on your tongue or your heart.

Remember, our heart is one of the most important organs in our body. It pumps nourishing blood to all of our cells, providing oxygen to our brain and glucose to our muscles. If you treat your heart right, your entire body will thank you. ☺

Chicken Parmigiana with Spaghetti Squash

SERVES 4

1 spaghetti squash, halved and seeded	4 chicken breasts (3 oz each), pounded until uniform thickness (about ½ inch)
½ tablespoon canola oil	
½ cup whole-grain flour	canola oil cooking spray
1 tablespoon dried oregano	2 cups of your favorite marinara sauce
¾ cup whole-grain bread crumbs	¼ cup fresh grated Parmesan cheese
½ teaspoon black pepper	½ cup fresh basil, chopped
1 egg, whisked	

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Brush squash with canola oil and place squash flesh side down on baking sheet. Bake 40 minutes or until squash is tender. While squash is baking, combine flour and oregano in shallow bowl. In second shallow bowl, combine bread crumbs with pepper. In third bowl, add whisked egg. Dip chicken into flour mixture, then egg, then bread crumbs—shake off excess with each step. Mist breaded chicken with canola oil cooking spray on both sides and place on baking sheet. Bake 15 minutes, top with marinara and Parmesan cheese and bake additional 15 minutes until heated and cheese is melted. Once squash is cooled, pull fork through flesh, creating spaghetti-like strands. Serve chicken on top of spaghetti squash and sprinkle with fresh basil.



Skillet Gnocchi with Butternut Squash and Kale Pesto

SERVES 6

Kale Pesto:

- 2 cups chopped kale leaves
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 ½ tablespoons chopped walnuts
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons canola oil

Gnocchi:

- 1 ½ cups frozen pre-cut (1-inch cubes) butternut squash, thawed
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 package (16 oz) prepared whole-grain gnocchi
- 1 cup kale leaves, cut into fine strips

To prepare pesto: In food processor, purée kale, lemon juice, Parmesan cheese, walnuts, and garlic for two minutes until paste forms. While processing on low, drizzle in canola oil.

Warm large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add pesto, butternut squash, and red onion (reserve two tablespoons for garnish) and sauté for five minutes. Add gnocchi and sauté another five minutes until thoroughly heated. Top with kale strips and chopped red onion. Serve.