

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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You have to face it - no matter how much you want to stay on that diet, fried foods just taste better! A diet with no fat would be horrible. It wouldn't taste good, it wouldn't satisfy our hunger, and before long we would be suffering from nutritional deficiencies. On the other hand, there is definitely too much of a good thing, and most of us are suffering from excess rather than not enough. But we do have choices!

Fried foods taste great. The combination of high heat, fat and starch or protein creates some flavors that just can not be made any other way. Frying also gives food a nice crispy crunch that feels good in our mouths. The fat carries flavors that we wouldn't be able to taste or smell without fat. And fat helps make us feel full longer. Those are the good things.

Unfortunately, there are bad things too. When fat gets hot enough to fry foods it is getting hot enough to start breaking down. As it breaks down the pieces rearrange themselves into other compounds. When some of these other chemicals are given to research animals they damage DNA. That can cause cancers. These chemicals can damage proteins in cells, so that they don't behave properly. Damaged or rearranged fats floating around through the blood stream harm blood vessels. Damaged fat also damages cholesterol and makes LDL, the bad kind, even more dangerous.

If hot fat starts to smoke or give off fumes, the damaged fats can be in the air. Then we breathe them into our lungs, where they can cause more damage. At least these are what happen to research animals that are given very large amounts of these

damaged fats. No one wants to be the guinea pigs for this kind of research on humans, so we can only guess that some of it will happen to us too. What can you do?

Only eat foods you fried at home. We know that the more often fat is heated, the more damaged fats are formed. If we used fresh oil every time there would be less damage. You can do that at home, but restaurants don't. Restaurants usually keep using fat over and over again for frying, until it starts to taste or smell bad. So one thing you can do is not order fried foods in restaurants or fast food places.

Don't reuse the oil you fry with. The fresher the oil is, the less damage it will have. It's best to not use oil that has been heated for sauces or dips too.

Don't bread foods you fry. Any kind of breading, whether it's flour, cornmeal or bread crumbs, soaks up more oil. The less oil you eat, the fewer problems you have.

If you fry, just pan fry. Deep frying adds lots more oil to the food. Use just a little bit of oil or butter in the pan. Make sure the oil is hot before you put the food in it. That way the food soaks up less fat.

Drain fried food on paper towels. You can get rid of some of the fat with paper towels.

Use olive oil for sauteing. Even though olive oil burns faster than other oils, it does not get damaged as fast. So if you are just using a little bit to saute meat or vegetables for a short time, it will be safer than other cooking oils. Don't try to use it for deep frying though.

Don't heat just the oil in a frying pan until you are ready to cook. The longer oil is preheated the more likely it will be damaged. And if it starts to smoke get it off the stove and cooled down right away. Then start over with fresh oil. Open the windows so the smoke can get out fast too.

Here's a dip you can have ready in minutes. Let the kids dip raw veggie sticks or baked chips in it for a meal. Or toast pita breads or tortillas until crispy, cut in wedges and dip away. If you don't have chili powder and cumin, use 1 tsp taco seasoning.

Chili Bean Dip

1 15 oz can kidney beans

2 tsp chopped onion

1 Tbsp vinegar

2 tsp chopped parsley

3/4 tsp chili powder

1/8 tsp ground cumin

Drain and rinse the beans. Put beans, vinegar, chili powder and cumin or taco seasoning in blender. Blend until smooth. Scrape beans into bowl and stir in onion and parsley. Serve with baked chips or veggie sticks. Refrigerate any leftovers. Serves 4 to 8.

Recipe from Northarvest Bean Grower Association.

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