

# GRAB AND GO LESSON

## Alternative Cooking Methods to Deep-Fat Frying

### Nutrition and Meal Management

**Purpose:** This handout provides an overview of deep-fat frying and three alternative cooking methods for preparing meals and snacks.

Did you know that on-site deep-fat frying is not allowed in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)? Deep-fat frying means to cook food by fully covering (submerging) the food in hot oil or other fat. “On-site” means at a child care center, family child care home, or central or satellite kitchen.

Many use this method to prepare fried foods, such as fried chicken, french fries, chicken nuggets, hush puppies, and more. However, eating too many fried foods during the early years and beyond increases the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses. Because of the dangers associated with a diet high in fried foods, the deep-fat frying method is not allowed on-site in CACFP-operated child care facilities and central or satellite kitchens.

### Alternative Cooking Methods

There are several alternative cooking methods for deep-fat frying, such as roasting, stir-frying, and grilling. Incorporating them into your food preparation process can make for more nutritious and appealing meals for those in your care.

#### Roasting/Baking

Roasting or baking involves cooking foods in the oven without any liquid. The main difference between the two methods is the oven temperature. Roasting temperatures are at 400 °F and above while baking temperatures are at 375 °F and below.

Some tips for roasting or baking meat or poultry include:

- Remove all visible fat.
- Add appropriate seasonings and flavorings to add flavor. Do not add salt unless the recipe calls for it, as salt slows browning and adds to the sodium content.
- Place the meat or poultry on a cooking rack or pan so air can circulate on all sides. Avoid covering and adding liquid unless the recipe calls for it.
- Roast or bake food until it reaches the appropriate internal temperature. Measure the food by placing a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the meat, away from bone, fat, or gristle.

Fruits and vegetables are other excellent options when roasting and baking. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Chop fruits and vegetables into equal-sized pieces so that they cook evenly.
- Add herbs, spices, and other flavorings to boost flavor.
- Place the fruit or vegetable pieces on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. As an alternative, toss fruits and vegetables with a small amount of oil.
- Make sure there is some space between the pieces so that air can circulate and brown the fruits or vegetables evenly.
- Cook until tender, but not mushy.

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#### Sautéing/Stir-Frying

Sautéing and stir-frying involve cooking foods in a pan on the stove with a small amount of liquid. (It could be a fat or oil, but even broth or water). The main differences between the two methods include the cooking temperature and the amount of stirring. Sautéing is usually over medium-high heat while turning the food very few times. Stir-frying is at a higher temperature while continuously stirring the food.

Some tips for sautéing and stir-frying include:

- Gather all ingredients at the start of meal preparation as both methods quickly cook foods.
- Chop foods into equal-sized pieces, when appropriate.
- Avoid adding too much food to the pan to avoid uneven cooking.
- Use healthy sources of fat if the recipe calls for oil, such as olive oil.
- Use the right types of pans. Some common examples include a skillet, sauté pan, wok, and cast iron pan.

#### Grilling/Broiling

Grilling and broiling involve cooking foods at very high temperatures, usually 400 °F or above. With grilling, the heat comes from below the food. When broiling food, the heat is above the food.

Some tips to help you grill or broil include:

- To avoid excess smoke when grilling or broiling, trim meats and poultry of visible fat. Add dry herbs or spices for flavor. Avoid using sauces as they can cause food to burn.
- Make sure grill racks or broiling pan are clean. If needed, coat them with vegetable oil or spray to keep foods from sticking.
- Heat the grill or broiler pan for 10–15 minutes before adding food.
- Leave space between food items to ensure even cooking.
- Use tongs instead of forks to turn solid pieces of meat as this promotes tenderness of meat by keeping the juices inside. Limit the number of times the food is flipped.
- If cooking more than one piece of food, they may not cook at the same rate. To avoid overcooking, remove the cooked pieces as they finish and keep them warm while remaining foods cook.

By using alternative cooking methods—roast/bake, sauté/stir-fry, or grill/broil—you can serve healthier meals to children in the CACFP. Refer to the Methods for Cooking handout at [www.fns.usda.gov/resources](http://www.fns.usda.gov/resources) for additional information.

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#### References

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