

Fall Produce and Family Friendly Recipes

by Kari McDonnough, CDM, Director of Dietary Services and Nutrition

Fall means new classes, new activities and sports, new schedules and a shift to colder weather foods. Regardless of age, having the right fuel — even better if it comes from produce that's at its peak — is key to helping kids do their best.



The sun is setting sooner, the nights get cooler and our bodies are not getting the level of sunshine we are used to and it becomes increasingly challenging to maintain a healthy diet," says Kari McDonnough, CDM, Director of Dietary Services and Nutrition at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital. "Combined with decreased physical activity and the desire for more comfort foods, we are setting ourselves up for a long winter and a challenging spring. Adding vegetables and fruit to our diet becomes increasingly important."

Harvest season has its own advantages such as these delicious fall foods. Learn some simple, kid-friendly ways to add them to your family's meals.

"Fall is the perfect time to celebrate with some of the season's best produce. Fall offers us some very hearty, rich and fiber dense produce. When you buy foods that are in-season, they have a richer flavor and are generally more cost effective," says Kari.

Pumpkin

Is anything more fall-like than a pumpkin? These famously orange winter squashes are chock-full of vitamin A and deliver 3 grams of fiber per ½-cup serving, plus potassium. And don't forget about roasting the seeds! Pumpkin seeds are a good source of several nutrients, including zinc, which is essential for many body processes including immune function.

Try pumpkin puree mixed into mac-and-cheese or with hummus for a seasonal spread. Looking for more options? Lisa Brown, MS, RDN, CDN, a registered dietitian in New York City, suggests adding it to pancake batter, oatmeal, smoothies or your kid's favorite chili.

Oats

Heart-healthy oats are loaded with fiber for slow-burning energy. Oats also provide vitamin B6 and other nutrients that are important for growth and development and overall health.

"A steaming bowl of oatmeal is the perfect breakfast on a cold day," Brown says. "The soluble fiber will help control blood sugar levels and keep your kids full until lunchtime. Top their oatmeal with nuts or nut butters, and fruit for extra vitamins, minerals and antioxidants." Or, replace the breadcrumbs in your favorite meatloaf recipe with oatmeal.

Apples

Apples pack a powerful nutrition punch. No wonder they sit on teachers' desks *and* keep the doctor away. They are a good source vitamin C. Leave the skin on for added fiber.

Slice and sprinkle apple slices with cinnamon or pair with cheese or peanut butter for an easy snack. Don't forget about dinner! Apples also taste great when stewed and served with savory foods such as roasted pork.

Combining apples and oats, here's recipe from Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital's Director of Dietary Services, Kari McDonnough:

Overnight Apples N' Oats

- Makes 4 servings
- ½ fresh apples, diced
- ½ cup apple juice
- 2 ounces dried cranberries
- 1 ½ tablespoons brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cups uncooked Quaker Old Fashion Oats

2 cups plain nonfat Greek Yogurt In a bowl, combine apples, juice, cranberries, brown sugar, and cinnamon. Mix well. Fold in Quaker Oats and Yogurt. Mix well until combined. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve chilled

Nutrition Information: 270 Calories; 55 mg Sodium; 0 g Saturated Fat; 5 g Fiber

Autumn harvest also bring an abundance of squashes. Below is a wonderful family friendly recipe using Butternut Squash:

Classic Butternut Squash Soup

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 cups cubed butternut squash, fresh or frozen
- 1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Heat oil in a large soup pot. Add carrot, celery and onion. Cook until vegetables have begun to soften and onion turns translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in butternut squash, thyme, chicken broth, salt and pepper.

Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until squash is fork-tender, about 30 minutes. Use an immersion blender to purée soup. Alternatively, let the soup cool slightly and carefully purée in batches in an upright blender.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 140 calories (50 from fat), 6g total fat, 1g saturated fat, 280mg sodium, 20g carbohydrates, (5 g dietary fiber, 4g sugar), 6g protein