

Summer Time and BBQ's

Summer time and bbq's seem to fall perfectly hand in hand but that doesn't mean you can't consume a balanced diet. Picnics, tailgates and barbecues are the perfect occasions to take advantage of the wonderful fruits and vegetables that are available from May through September.

If you are outside in the fresh air consume foods that are fresh and found in nature -- like vegetables, fruits, seeds, nuts, legumes and water instead of processed foods created in labs and factories. This allows you to continue following MyPlate's recommendations by creating a plate that's half fruits and vegetables.

If you're hosting an outdoor gathering, forget about processed foods. Instead, use fresh, seasonal ingredients to create a balanced meal that includes vegetables, salads and healthy snacks like hummus. Use legumes -- beans, peas or lentils -- to make salads or side dishes. They are high in fiber and vitamins and much healthier than sugar-loaded baked beans or calorie-laden mayo-based potato or macaroni salads.

Also, healthy oils and vinegars to add flavor to salads, for example, blend olive with different types of vinegar or lemon juice, or combine rice vinegar and sesame oil.

For snacks, try raw unsalted nuts, marinated olives, hummus, guacamole and sliced vegetables. If you do serve chips, choose a baked variety.

For a barbecue, choose lean cuts of beef and trim excess fat. Texas Beef Council notes, beef is a great source of protein, iron, zinc and provides long lasting energy. When grilling beef, remember there is a 10 degree "hangover" time. If you prefer your delicious juicy steak at medium rare, remove the steak at 135 internal degrees and during the 10 minute "hangover" time the steak will reach a medium rare internal temperature of 145 degrees.

Be sure to add vegetables and fruit to the grill. Good choices include red, yellow and green peppers, yellow squash, mushrooms, red onions, and pineapple. Staying hydrated is very important during the summer months; fruits and vegetables can provide additional hydration.

Source: Katherine Farrell Harris, director of Integrated Nutrition for AdvantageCare Physicians