

Bake it – Don't Fry It

Most of us know that fried foods contain more fat and calories than we should eat on a daily basis, but they taste so good. There is no need to avoid all fat to have a healthy diet. Adults and children need some fat for proper growth and development. The goal is to eat healthy fats in moderation. Fat enhances the flavor and texture of food and helps you feel full longer. Because we develop lifelong preferences for foods in childhood, now is a great time to expose children to the taste of some lightened up versions of traditionally fried foods.

Here are some tips for creating the crunch and flavor of some favorite fried foods with less fat and calories.

- A breading of flour, corn starch, corn meal or bread crumbs, a light mist of vegetable oil or cooking spray and a hot oven is the key to many oven fried foods.
- For a really crispy crust, add crispy ingredients to the breading such as crushed corn flakes, crisp rice cereal or toasted bread crumbs.
- Oven fried potatoes, sweet potatoes and egg rolls only require a light brush of vegetable oil or mist of non-stick vegetable spray and a hot oven to create a crisp crust.
- Marinating chicken and other meats in buttermilk helps the meat stay moist and juicy on the inside, while developing a crispy crust.
- Some hard-to-brown foods might need a few minutes under the broiler to add color and a crisp texture.

Children enjoy fried foods as much as adults. Providing them with a healthier version of some of their favorite fried foods might feel challenging. Introducing new foods will require some cooperation on your child's part and experimentation on your part to find the oven-baked foods that your family will enjoy. To increase cooperation and acceptance, make children part of a taste test panel in your house as you find the healthier version of foods you love.

Crispy Oven Chicken Tenders

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken tenderloins or chicken breast cut into long strips

1 cup fat-free buttermilk

2 ½ cups crispy rice cereal

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon paprika

¾ teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/8 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper (optional)

Non-stick vegetable spray

1. Place chicken in a re-sealable gallon size plastic bag. Pour buttermilk over chicken and seal bag. Refrigerate chicken and buttermilk bag for 2 to 24 hours
2. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
3. Spray a wire cooling rack with vegetable cooking spray and put it on top of a baking sheet
4. Combine rice cereal and ingredients. Crush the cereal with hands as you mix with spices.
5. Remove chicken pieces from the buttermilk, shaking lightly to remove excess liquid. Roll each chicken piece in rice mixture. Use your hands to press extra mixture onto chicken.
6. Place coated chicken on wire rack and coat lightly with cooking spray.
7. Bake 10 chicken 10 minutes.
8. Remove tray from oven and turn chicken pieces over. Coat the second side with cooking spray. Return to oven and cook another 10 to 15 minutes or until chicken is cooked through and coating is golden brown.

Source: Colorado State Extension