

Healthy cooking doesn't mean that you have to become a gourmet chef or buy expensive cookware. Simply use basic cooking methods to prepare foods in healthy ways.

These cooking methods offer ways to capture the flavor and nutrients from your food without adding excessive amounts of fat or salt. Once you've mastered these techniques, use them often to prepare your favorite dishes.

Baking

Besides breads and desserts, use this method to cook evenly-sized pieces of vegetables, fruit, seafood, and poultry or lean meat. Place food in a pan or dish where the hot, dry air of your oven surrounds it. The food may be covered or uncovered. Baking generally doesn't require that you add fat to the food.

Braising

This method involves browning the ingredient first in an open or covered pan on top of the stove and then slowly cooking it with a small quantity of liquid. In some recipes, the cooking liquid is used afterward to form flavorful, nutrient-rich gravy.

Blanching

Precook food for a short amount of time in boiling water for less than one minute and then place it immediately in an ice water bath. This helps to loosen the skin on foods like tomatoes.

Grilling and broiling

Both of these cooking methods expose food to direct heat. To grill outdoors, place the food on a grill rack above a bed of charcoal briquettes or gas-heated rocks. When grilling smaller items, use a long-handled grill basket, which prevents pieces from slipping through the rack. To broil indoors, place food on a broiler rack below the heat element in your oven. Both methods allow fat to drip away from the food.

Marinating

Marinating adds flavor and tenderness to foods. Cover the food item completely with a marinade for a few hours. You can make your own marinade from a recipe or buy ones already made. If the food needs to be refrigerated, the marinating time can take place when the food is in the refrigerator.

Cooking Methods

Poaching

To poach foods, gently simmer ingredients in water or a flavorful liquid such as broth, vinegar or juice until cooked through and tender. For stovetop poaching, choose a covered pan that best fits the size and shape of the food so that you use a minimum amount of liquid. You can also poach foods in foil packets in the oven or on the grill.

Roasting

Like baking, but at higher temperatures, roasting uses an oven's dry heat to cook the food. You can roast foods on a baking sheet or in a roasting pan. For poultry, seafood and meat, place a rack inside the roasting pan so that the fat in the ingredients will drip away during cooking.

Sautéing

This method quickly cooks small or thin pieces of food quickly. If you choose a high-quality nonstick pan, you can cook food without using fat. Depending on the recipe, use broth, nonstick cooking spray or water in place of oil.

Steaming

One of the simplest cooking techniques to master is steaming food in a perforated basket suspended above simmering liquid. Add a flavorful liquid or seasonings to the water to flavor the food as it cooks.

Stir-frying

A traditional Asian method, stir-frying quickly cooks small, evenly-sized pieces of food while they are rapidly stirred in a wok or large nonstick frying pan. You need only a small amount of oil or nonstick cooking spray.

There is nothing particularly difficult, unusual or complicated about healthy cooking techniques. In fact, novice cooks and seasoned chefs all use the basic methods. Try a few recipes, decide which methods you like best and use them often to prepare healthier meals and menus.

