

This tastes like ... dining out - at home

Written by By CINDY WELCH, Food Columnist
Tuesday, 24 February 2009 10:11



Food is getting more expensive. Whether you eat out or eat at home, what you eat is costing you more. There is debate about whether eating out costs more by the time you add in all of the variables. I think it depends on where you eat, what you eat and how many in your family are eating with you. About 71 percent of adults reported cooking at home more and eating out less in a recent survey by the Food Marketing Institute. Restaurant sales, after rising steadily for 16 years, slipped by 1.2 percent last year and are expected to drop another 1 percent in 2009, according to the National Restaurant Association.

"This always happens in a downturn because eating away from home is primarily a luxury for most people," said Jean Kinsey, professor of applied economics and co-director of the Food Industry Center at the University of Minnesota.

But most of the time, cooking at home is cheaper and often healthier. You are more involved in the choice of ingredients. How do you start to eat more often at home?

"The Lazy Person's Guide to Eating More Meals at Home" is a good place to start:

The author advises that people making the transition from dining out to eating at home should:

- Start small — Pick one day a week to make meals at home, or two, or three. Start with easy recipes.
- Start with simple ingredients — Don't make it complicated. Don't be afraid to start with prepackaged foods. (His favorite meal has always been a can of chili. It always will be. You can buy a case of the stuff at Costco for 86 cents a can.)

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- Find a good source of recipes — Borrow some cookbooks from the library or from a friend. Find one you like. Learn to cook from it. Copy out your favorite recipes.

- Use the Taco Bell approach — Learn to recombine a few basic ingredients into multiple tasty dishes

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Some of the simplest recipes you can make are those that mimic or copycat your favorite restaurant meals. Many of these recipes can be found in books or on the Internet.

Here are a few of my favorites.

Tastes Like Olive Garden's Salad Dressing

1/2 C. Mayonnaise
1/3 C. White Vinegar
1 tsp. Vegetable Oil
2 Tbsp. Corn Syrup
2 Tbsp. Parmesan Cheese
2 Tbsp. Romano Cheese
1/4 tsp. Garlic Salt - or one clove garlic minced
1/2 tsp. Italian Seasoning
1/2 tsp. Parsley Flakes
1 Tbsp. Lemon Juice

Mix all ingredients in a blender until well mixed. If this is a little to tart for your own personal tastes please add a little extra sugar.

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Just Like Luby's Macaroni and Cheese

2 cups dry elbow macaroni(8 oz.)
2 tablespoons nonfat dry milk powder
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon butter or margarine, melted
1 1/4 cups boiling water
3 cups American cheese, shredded (12 oz.)
1/4 teaspoon salt

Cook macaroni according to package directions. Heat oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, mix dry milk, flour, and butter. Gradually add boiling water, beating constantly. Add 1 1/2 of the cheese and continue beating until smooth and creamy. Stir in macaroni, 1 cup of the remaining cheese, and salt. Transfer to lightly greased 2-qt baking dish. Cover with foil. Bake 25 minutes. Remove foil. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese. Continue baking 1 minute or until cheese melts.

Could Be La Madeleine's Tomato Basil Soup

4 cups chopped canned tomatoes
4 cups tomato juice (or part chicken stock)
12-14 basil leaves
1 cup heavy cream
1/4 pound unsalted butter
Salt to taste
1/4 teaspoons cracked black pepper

Combine tomatoes, juice/and or stock in saucepan. Simmer 30 minutes. Puree, along with the basil leaves, in small batches, in blender, food processor (or better yet, one of those handy hand-held food blenders, right in the cooking pan). Return to saucepan and add cream and butter, while stirring, over low heat. Garnish with basil leaves and serve with your favorite bread.

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For the past 20 years, Cindy Welch has been involved with all aspects of cooking, including formal culinary training, experience as food service director for First Baptist Church of Euless, a personal chef and owner of Cindy's Casa Cuisine. Cindy's favorite hobby is "providing delicious food for the people"

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of Sulphur Springs.” Her columns cover all aspects of the cooking experience.