

Do your guests a favor and offer a health-conscious party spread

By Shelby Sheehan-Bernard McClatchy-Tribune News Service (MCT) | Posted: Thursday, June 5, 2014 8:38 am

Chips and salsa, quesadillas and chicken fingers. All of these standard party appetizers are delicious, but they're also veritable landmines for anyone trying to watch their carb intake.

"It's OK for hosts to use carbs and sugars in party dishes, but they can plan to serve a balanced selection of comforting bites vs. good-for-you bites," says Jackie Newgent, a registered dietitian and author of the "All-Natural Diabetes Cookbook" (American Diabetes Association, \$18.95) and "1,000 Low-Calorie Recipes" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$35).

Well-meaning hosts may put out packaged low-fat or fat-free foods to cater to health-conscious guests, but according to Newgent, many of those items may have added corn syrup and other sugars, salt, refined starch and other processed thickeners, and artificial flavors or preservatives to make up for loss of texture or flavor of the missing fat.

For an easy, simple pick, she suggests serving a hummus or other bean dip with a non-starchy vegetable like broccoli florets or cucumber slices, or tomatoes stuffed with tuna salad (lightly dressed).

Protein is essential for low-carbers, with eggs and chicken both being good choices. And there's no need to just use egg whites or remove the chicken skin. "Most of the nutrients in the eggs are actually in the yolk," explains Newgent and "using the chicken skin can boost enjoyment when eating healthfully."

Registered dietitian, certified diabetes educator and creator of lowcarbdietitian.com Franziska Spritzler also suggests stocking your kitchen low-carb staples like cheese, olives, nuts and avocados, along with meat, seafood and vegetables.

If you want to expand your low-carb appetizer menu to a prepared dish, try one of these recipes:

PARSLEY, SAGE, ROSEMARY AND THYME FRITTATA BITES

Makes 12 servings.

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons grapeseed oil

1 large red or Spanish onion, finely diced

2 teaspoons white balsamic vinegar

4 large eggs plus 4 large egg whites

1/2 cup plain almond milk

3/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste

1/2 cup finely shredded extra-sharp Cheddar cheese

1/3 cup whole-wheat couscous

3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh sage or 1 teaspoon ground sage

1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary

1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line the bottom of an 8-inch square baking dish with parchment paper. Coat the pan sides with cooking spray.

Heat the oil in a large (PFOA-free) nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and vinegar and saute until fully softened and just beginning to caramelize, about 10 minutes. Set aside.

Whisk together the eggs, egg whites, almond milk, salt and pepper in a medium bowl until well combined. Add the cheese, couscous, parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme and stir until combined. Add the cooked onion and stir until combined.

Pour the egg mixture into the prepared dish. Bake until the mixture has set, about 35 minutes. Cool on a rack.

Fully trim around the outside edges. Turn out onto a cutting board. Cut into 36 squares using a bread knife. Serve warm or at room temperature with toothpicks.

Nutritional information per serving: 90 calories, 6 g total carbohydrate, 1g dietary fiber, 4.5g total fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 65mg cholesterol, 230mg sodium,, 1g sugars, 5g protein.

From "1,000 Low-Calorie Recipes" by Jackie Newgent (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$35).

CAPRESE SALAD SKEWERS

Makes 15 skewers.

Ingredients:

5 cups cherry tomatoes

16 ounces fresh buffalo mozzarella, cut into 1-inch cubes

Fresh basil leaves

1 tablespoon sea salt

2 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

15 skewer picks

Directions:

Tear basil leaves into bite-sized pieces.

Assemble skewers by alternating tomato, mozzarella, and basil leaves.

Drizzle olive oil over skewers.

Sprinkle skewers with sea salt

Nutritional information per skewer: 120 calories, 2g total carbohydrate, 1g fiber, 1g net carbohydrate, 9g fat, 7g protein.

From Franziska Spritzler of www.lowcarbdietitian.com.

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