

# Dine—at Your Own Inn

When we talk about a fine dining experience we generally say, “We had a wonderful time,” “It was a beautiful evening,” or “It was awesome,” instead of saying, “The dessert was very, very, very sweet,” or “The meat was well-cooked.” It is the whole experience that counts and makes the difference. Your home-banquet should be very special and should appeal to all six senses. It is your mission to create something better than a five-star restaurant at your own *dine-inn*, using your kitchen and breakfast room.

You are the movie director and it is up to you to create an ambience that exceeds the one in a steak house, a seafood place, an ethnic restaurant, on the beach, or over the sea on a love boat. Since, the choices are limited only by your imagination, be bold and daring. Do something different that is more rewarding and fulfilling than just driving across town to grab an unhealthy piece of meat.

A heart-healthy lifestyle may mean changing your culture, if not your religion, when it comes to reprogramming your habits and appetites as well as restocking your kitchen, refrigerator, and pantry.

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### Delightful Dinners

Dinner is more than just another meal. It is the final reward for your existence and effort. It is an experience you look forward to while working all day long. And it is ultimately up to you to create a dining experience at your own inn that surpasses any you might enjoy at the finest restaurant in your town. Of course, you may have to act multiple roles, such as an intelligent shopper, an interior decorator, a chef, a waiter, a host, and a guest. I recognize it is a lot to expect from you at the end of a long day. Still, the pleasant voyage taken with your dinner partner is worth every minute of your effort. This grants you an opportunity to spend quality time with your partner while you two become the architects of your own heart-healthy dining delight. Before you can reach that zenith though, you must invest some time, effort, and money to transform your kitchen and dining room into a dream world.

If you do not own a convection oven, invest in a modern counter-top Ultra-Vection oven that grills food quickly and crisply. *Grilling aids in preparing heart-healthy meals, while reducing cooking and cleaning time.*

Marinate your lean-cut chicken breast, trimmed fillet minion, lamb or pork chops, or fish overnight. Be liberal with your spices and easy on the oil, since most meat contains hidden fat. Cook the meat in the oven for 10-12 minutes on each side. While the meat is cooking get the table ready and let your partner prepare the side dishes.

Steam-cook your vegetables on a stove or in a microwave oven. Season your vegetables with a touch of olive oil or Benecol (a heart-healthy margarine substitute—plant stanol) along with salt, pepper, and your favorite spices.

Get the music going as the sun goes down on your side of town, while decorating your dining table with a tablecloth, placemats, elegant centerpiece, candles, decent china, clean silverware, nice hot pads, napkins, and wine glasses. Get rid of the plastic plates and glasses. It feels sophisticated and romantic to drink water out of a wine glass. Make sure the dining room is as light as the gentle sunset skies.

Settle down with a glass of red wine—as the heart doctor recommended—and some nuts of your choice as you enjoy your partner's company.

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When the meat is cooked, treat your partner and yourself to a delightful candlelight dinner filled with soft gentle music and a romantic ambience. This priceless experience is not only beneficial to your heart and soul but also enjoyable (unlike a 3000-calorie unhealthy food and drink splurge in front of a TV that pollutes your living room with horrific pictures and shrilling sounds).

As you can see, I have spent a substantial amount of time discussing the dinner aesthetics, instead of dwelling on the quantity or richness of food itself in terms of butter, cholesterol, or sugar. This is what I call a life-rejuvenation revolution, replacing those old and unhealthy lifestyles that previously had usurped your life.

After dinner, you can turn up the music and have a relaxing, romantic after-dinner dance with your partner, burning those excess calories while loosening up your muscles and joints. Watch out! This experience could be addictive. But it is better to be addicted to a heart-healthy habit than to be enslaved to old routines.

The best part this dinner practice is that you get to clean up the dinning room and the dishes while your spouse nicely packs away the remaining food for the next day's afternoon snack. That is what I call working in unison! At least you are spending quality time with your spouse instead of arguing. When the kitchen is clean and the dinning room lights are low, you are ready to wind down your evening in the company of your spouse on the family-room couch. That is far better than driving back from a distant restaurant in a disgusted, lonely mood, because your spouse is still fuming at you for not paying the gas bill on time last month and for addressing the waiter rudely.

One day when you invite your family and friends over for an evening, they will be astonished at your creativity and admire your aesthetic taste all evening long. The tranquil environment and pleasant company will leave many fond memories for reminiscing on during blustery, winter afternoons. This could be an excellent occasion to share with them the amazing heart-healthy lifestyle you have learned and what a difference it has made in your life. Don't forget to apply your new lifestyle even when you are eating out.

Why is dining at your own inn so essential, you may ask? It is your only chance to spend quality time with your spouse in the tranquility of your own home, while enjoying a heart-healthy dinner. When you both work, opportunities for dining at your inn are rare. You

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may have dinner meetings twice a week with your business group, while your spouse has her lady's night out every Wednesday. Then you have to take part in the kids' football games—top that off with three weekend parties. That leaves you with maybe one or two days a week to enjoy a heart-healthy, home-cooked meal. I bet you will be very sorry if you spoil that chance.

Dining in at your own inn has several advantages. For one, you don't have to drive halfway across town for a meal and then wait in line for an hour and a half because you are number ninety-three. At home you don't have to share your lungs with the smokers in a crowded bar, nor do you have to wait outside in the freezing cold. In addition, you won't have to face an entourage of restaurant models: check-in girl, water girl, menu boy, the manager, and finally the real fellow who is actually supposed to serve you. Sometimes dining out is exhausting. Not only do you have to listen to a long, memorized house special recital—which only consists of greasy, fatty, fluffy, fried foods—but you also end up settling for whatever the newly hired, half-English-speaking chef dishes out. The food arrives late, the service is lousy, and the drinks are messed up. Your steak is half-cooked and the entire evening turns into a night that you wish you had never visited.

### Dining-Inn Choices

Here are some heart-healthy choices to consider when preparing your multi-course dinner at your-inn.

**Appetizers:** Make sure your appetizers are light and simple. You can munch on an ounce of nuts, which provides you with protein and polyunsaturated fats. Limit your nuts to less than an ounce, since most of them contain twelve to fourteen grams of fat. Macadamia nuts are high in saturated fats and should be avoided. You also can nibble on vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, or cauliflower seasoned with salt and pepper or dipped in your favorite low-fat dressing. Make conversation the main appetizing ingredient for the happy hour. Let your tongue do more talking and less chewing. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the happy hour is to socialize with other people. You could always stuff yourself equally well at home, on the road, or in the back seat of a car. But you cannot talk or shake hands with your friends if you attach yourself to the edge of the cocktail table and sink into an

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appetite indulgence expedition. Avoid isolating yourself from the rest of the group and complaining that no one talks to you and that this world is a miserable place. There is no such thing as a miserable world. The world is exactly as you see and feel it. It is up to you to make your own world. If you make a wonderful and joyful world around you, people will come spend time with you and have fun.

**Drinks:** As mentioned elsewhere, red wine has been shown to reduce heart disease risk because of its antioxidants properties. However, white wine does not provide the same benefits. In any case, a glass of red or white wine (considering that you are old enough to drink) should add some pizzazz to your dining experience. By all means drink plenty of water before, during, and after the dinner. You may enjoy a hot cup of freshly brewed coffee or tea, if that makes you happy. Avoid soft drinks, which are loaded with empty calories.

**Side dishes:** Cook most of your vegetables by steaming or boiling in hot water for a few minutes. Season them with olive oil, salt, pepper, and spices to make a tasty side dish in minutes.

**Desserts:** It is not essential for every meal to have a dessert in order to be complete. Desserts come on small plates with huge calories. Prepare your own desserts using an artificial sweetener instead of sugar, thus reducing the calories by fifty percent or more. Use Benecol—a heart-healthy fat—in place of real butter or Crisco to minimize saturated fats. While your creative juices are still following through your veins or brains, you can develop a low-calorie, low-fat dessert that is just as yummy as the original high-calorie, high-fat dessert. Did you know you could make a zero-calorie Jell-O for dessert? Hence, re-engineering your lifestyle is an essential part of a heart-healthy life.

### Missing Dinner Recipes

Most diet books include 200-300 pages of dinner recipes. I grew up all my life eating Indian food. If you don't enjoy Indian food, then 200 pages of Indian recipes would be useless to you. Hence, after extensively reviewing cardiology literature and nutrition books, I have made a list of the items that I believe are heart-healthy. I also have included tips on cooking heart-healthy meals using minimal amounts of fat and carbs. Using these tips you can craft out countless numbers of

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ethnic delights of your choice. The options are only limited by your imagination.

### **Appetizers:**

Dry roasted soy nuts (1 oz)  
Peanuts or almonds (1/2 to 1 oz)  
Celery  
Cucumber (One)  
Berries  
Apple (1)  
Plums  
Dry roasted chickpeas (1/2 cup)  
Spicy tofu cubes  
Fruits (1-2)  
Pumpkin seeds (1 oz)  
Vegetables with low-fat vegetable dips

### **Main items:** *Skin less, lean, fat-trimmed, and boneless.*

Grilled Salmon, mackerel, or tuna (4 oz)  
Fajita chicken with whole-wheat tortillas  
Fajita beef with whole-wheat tortillas  
Sirloin steak (4 oz, roasted with your favorite spices)  
Grilled lean beef (4 oz)  
Grilled chicken breast (seasoned with lemon pepper, 4 oz)  
Grilled lean pork-chops (trimmed, 4 oz)  
Grilled lean lamb chops (4 oz)  
Shish kabobs (beef, chicken, or lamb)  
Roasted lean lamb or beef (4 oz)  
Roasted skinless chicken (4 oz)  
Grilled shrimp (6-8 pieces)  
Ground beef (2% fat)  
Ground turkey (2-7% fat)  
Veggie burgers

### **Beans:** *All types of beans (1/2 cup)*

Lima beans (1/2 cup)  
Chickpeas (1/2 cup)  
Kidney beans (1/2 cup)

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Black-eyed peas ½ cup  
Soybean hamburger patties

### **Carbs:**

Basmati rice (½ cup)  
Pasta (½ cup)  
Bread (1-2 slices)  
High fiber tortillas (10 g fiber per tortilla)

### **Vegetables:**

Spinach (1 cup)  
Asparagus  
String beans  
Cauliflower  
Broccoli  
Okra (½ cup)  
Mixed vegetables  
Eggplants

### **Fruits:** *(Please, be sure to add the fruit calories to your total carb count)*

Pear  
Apple

### **Drinks:**

Wine (6-8 oz)  
Lemon-juice with a sweetener  
Iced tea with a sweetener  
Water  
Coffee or tea  
Rum flavored diet coke! How about that?

### **Side dish:**

Steamed vegetables, fruits,  
Cottage cheese (fat free) in place of potato or carrots  
Low-calorie whole wheat bread  
Green salad  
Sugar-free Jell-O salads

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### Desserts:

Fruit plate

Pears (½ cup)

Gelatin desserts with sweetener

Homemade desserts (using a sweetener and Benecol)

Low fat ice cream (*pokito!*)

Low fat yogurt, sherbet, or puddings

### Salads & Soups:

Dinner salad

Greek salad with light dressing

Caesar salad with light dressing or lime-pepper

Salsa

Soups: Lentils, pea, onion, bean, beef, or vegetable

*(Soups have a high salt content. Avoid them if you have blood pressure problems.)*

### Salad Dressings:

Olive oil (1 tsp.)

Light dressing (20 cal) in place of regular dressing (170 calories)

### Spices:

Lime-pepper

Red chili powder

Seasoning—Cajun, Greek, Italian, Tandori, etc.

### Shopping List

**Music:** Gather the most romantic, soothing, and relaxing music compilation from around the world from your local music store. Copy the songs onto a CD in an MP3 format. Then with a touch of a button, you can have tranquil music filling your heart and mind for hours and hours without disruption. Select the random option so that the sequence of songs is never the same each day.

**Table Setup:** Make your breakfast table as aesthetic and attractive as any dining table you have seen in one of the finest restaurants. Invest in a fine set of silverware with sharp steak knives. They will last for a decade. You can get a four-piece china set for \$150, and you know you

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would spend more than that if you took your mother-in-law out to eat! But, of course, she would not be happy no matter how elegant the evening might be. Your opportunity to enjoy a delightful homespun dinner is few and far between. One spouse may be on business trips *thirteen* months a year while the other spouse has to attend business meetings five nights a week. Hence, advance planning for that one day a week available is essential to create cherishable memories.

**Lighting:** Replace those blinding two-hundred-watt light bulbs with soft, colorful sixty-watt light bulbs. Now is also a good time to invest in a stylish chandelier that matches the new décor of your dining table. Color coordination is very important. Men are born color-clueless according to some ladies, if you have not noticed. To avoid making numerous trips to the store in vain, consult with your lady before you invest in a gold chandelier that doesn't match with your bonze décor. If of you visit the store at the same time, let your lady do the talking and shopping while you do the paying. It is better to settle your differences in front of the store manager in a civilized style according to the lady's rule. That is less stressful on your heart and nerves and is a part of heart-healthy living, my friend! What part don't you understand? While you are at the store, purchase a dimmer switch so that the light illumination in your dining room can be tuned in sync with your romantic vibrations.

**Serving Utensils:** Make sure that your daily serving utensils are of a good, durable quality with a shimmering shine. If you don't go out to eat for at least three months, you will have saved enough money to invest in a silver serving set. Use wine glasses for water as well as for wine like the five-star-restaurants do: This adds a whole new dimension to your dining experience. Remember, it is the ambiance and the total experience that we are trying to emphasize; an evening should be more than just chewing on each other's nerves as the night winds down.

**Grilling Class:** Though, traditionally outdoor grilling has been a man's pride, indoor grilling is a completely different dimension for a man. You will certainly need the assistance of your spouse for indoor grilling. Most men know how to operate an outside grill, but they are like a fish out of water when they are exposed to indoor grills. Without indoor grilling talents, a man can easily convert a prime rib into a charcoal cube in the absence of his spouse's assistance and guidance. In an indoor cooking situation, there is a tendency for a man to loose track

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of his time because it is not mission-critical when cooking outdoors. His mental calculations may be so far off the base, he may not realize that he has been “cooking” for an hour with no food on the kitchen grill.

Cooking together also allows for lovely grill-side conversations. So, for the unfortunate man who has never been educated about the wiles of kitchen cooking and is now forced into position as chef, I will mention a few helpful hints that I myself painfully learned over the years. First of all, when cooking anywhere, outside or inside, leave the meat simmering on low-heat for the last few minutes to give the juices time to “settle-in” and to preserve the meat’s moisture and tenderness. Also, I know that it might be a culture shock for you gentlemen to cook in a smoke-free environment. At first, you might have a little trouble thinking outside of the haze you are used with backyard grilling. But get used to it. When grilling outdoors, you might have to fight charcoal smoke and/or cigarette smoke, but indoor grilling will vanquish both the charcoal smoke and certainly the cigarette smoke—another step towards your heart-healthy lifestyle!

While the meat is being cooked, don’t stick your finger into the oven to taste the chicken breast, like you normally would do in an outdoor setting. Your spouse will instruct you when and how to taste the food cooking on the time-regulated, indoor grill. Some dining etiquette is in order here.

When you are officially instructed to inspect the food, make sure to use a spoon or a fork and let the food cool before you burn your taste buds. Be very gentle with your comments or suggestions, lest you wreck the rest of the evening.

If you don’t have anything good to say, hold your thoughts till the next generation or until you go on the next hunting trip with your buddies. That would be a wonderful time to spin fireside tall tales while waiting for some living creature to cross by your path. (Not knowing, of course, that there is none in a hundred mile radius!). This may be the only place where you might enjoy a sympathetic audience. Your buddies might have had worse experience in grilling, and will be ready to punch in the rest of your story. That might leave a gratifying memory, even if you don’t bring home the 12-point antler set.

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**Plan for the week:** When you serve yourself a sizzling hot, made-to-order, gourmet dinner at your own dining table, your sensations are sure to climax. In order to realize this sensual dream, visit your local grocery or health-food store along with your spouse or friend to select lean-cut meats suitable for grilling or baking. Marinate the meat and put each day's quota in a freezer Ziploc bag. Then, just transfer the meat that you are planning to eat the next day to the refrigerator the night before. The meat will be defrosted and well marinated by the time you are ready to grill. Do not leave the meat outside at room temperature, as it is likely to be spoiled by the time you return home. You can also season your frozen vegetables and move them to the refrigerator the night before. They will be ready for steam cooking and seasoning the next evening.

**Further your culinary knowledge:** Watch various cooking channels to learn hundreds of different ways to grill your favorite foods instead of frying them in a pond of floating grease. Set aside a Sunday to search Google under the heading *Grilling* or *Barbequing*. Learn how different ethnic groups marinate their meats in a thousand different ways by using exotic spices to accent a distinctive flavor. You will then be able to enjoy foods from all around the world in you own kitchen. Turn your kitchen into an international cooking laboratory specializing in dinner cuisine from around the world, where the process of cooking takes center stage rather than the indulgence in unhealthy foods.

### Some “Do-Nots!”

A grilled chicken Caesar salad may sound healthy! However, ingredients such as dressings, croutons, and avocados can add as much as 400-600 extra calories. The trick to enjoying a healthy salad is to order the dressing on the side or use a light dressing. Eat only a portion of the croutons and spare the rest.

Eating in front of the television is the greatest threat to your belt-line or hip-perimeter. Generally, people are addicted to both television and food. When you combine these two addictions, you are likely to lose control over both. In other words, you cannot stop until the game is over or the house is free of any edibles. Then, you will start searching for snacks, nuts, or anything else that you can get your fingers on. I have seen people chewing on aluminum foil in desperate

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situations, to get thorough the game so that they can go out for a festive food-stuffing ceremony after the game! Oh! Did I mention alcohol?

**Calories:** Practically speaking, everything that slips past your lips has some calories, and calories add up very quickly!

Never eat food when you are angry. That is a dangerous approach to resolve your frustration, since your appetite and calorie count will always give up in the end. A better alternative is to take a walk away from the kitchen for a couple of days, or a cold shower until the tap runs dry or you turn blue. Cooling your temper by thirty to forty degrees is critical before you move back into the kitchen. Law enforcement people hate to walk over broken china or half-baked potatoes. If you have not realized, only you will have to cleanup the mess before the lady arrives for an inspection! A wiser approach would be to calmly analyze the situation that ignited your passionate anger and determine how much you were responsible for it. Then take appropriate steps so that you eliminate your share of fuel to the fire. An opponent without opposition soon loses steam. Automatically, you win!

**Overstuffing:** Make sure that you do not overstuff yourself late at night. Excess fatty acids stay longer in the stomach and produce acid reflex in the esophagus, stimulating heartburn in the middle of the night. Over time this may erode your esophagus, leading to esophagitis, which is hard to cure. Finish your dinner at least a couple of hours before you retire to bed and walk as much as possible. Better yet, take a walk around the block after dinner, provided your neighborhood is not infested with stray dogs! Walking help you burn extra calories, exercise your muscles, and get a good night's sleep.

Finishing your dinner early gives you extra time to be creative in using the rest of the evening. You can use this time to plan your next day or next several days. Write down all the things that you have on your mind before you go to sleep, providing your subconscious mind something to work on while you sleep.

**Lean Cuisine:** Beware of the content of Lean Cuisines. Most of them emphasize low-fat, which means they are loaded with disproportionate amounts of carbohydrates. Do not be misled by "low-fat" or "fat-free" claims. Pay special attention to carbohydrates, salt, and cholesterol. Most frozen foods have a much higher salt content than their fresh counterparts. The sauce and creams usually contain carbohydrates and fats, which add a lot of empty calories. As a rule of

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thumb, if the lean cuisine has more than 30 grams of carbohydrates, select fatless chicken, beef, or turkey lunchmeats instead. Then add your own vegetables and become an educated consumer rather than falling prey to advertising slogans such as “low fat” or “fat free.” If the package reads 60 to 80 grams of carbohydrates, then don’t touch it. Move to the next item.

**To be completed**