

EAT BEAT

by Martha Wagner

Cookbooks



Unless you spent the holidays bedded down with the flu, cross-country skiing—without any chocolate bars, or doing sit-ups and eating virtuous little meals at a health spa, chances are you've begun a post-holiday diet or have promised yourself to clean up your eating habits in 1986.

As the national appetite for health and fitness grows, fewer people are opting for crash diets. More people are beginning to view weight control as part of a long-term eating strategy for improved health. For many, the strategy includes eating less meat, less fat, less sugar, more vegetables, more fish, more whole grains.

One of the best ways to begin making these changes is with the help of one of the new nutrition-focused cookbooks. These books have come a long way from the sprouty, sunflower seed-laden cuisine of the seventies. Today's healthy fare is grilled and steamed entrees, light sauces, and fresh fruit desserts. It's being created by a wide range of cooks, ranging from hotel and health spa chefs to recipe developers at mainstream women's magazines.

If you're looking for a new cookbook to inspire you to eat better, do allow ample time for browsing. Make sure that the recipes appeal to you and that they don't require more time than you have. Check out the ingredients used. Are they easily available? Are recipes truly low in fat and sugar (or honey)? Is there introductory material on nutrition, shopping or menu planning which could help you?

A Good Year for Cookbooks

Last year was a good year for health-conscious cookbooks. Here's a report on some of the best.

"How would you like to eat more potatoes, pasta, bread, rice and other starchy foods without feeling nutritionally guilty or worrying about putting on unwanted pounds? How would you like to say good-bye forever to distorted weight-reduction schemes and feelings of deprivation and self-denial, and instead leave the table satisfied, invigorated and slender?"

New York Times health columnist Jane Brody promises this happy, healthy scenario in the introduction of her new *Jane Brody's Good Food Book, Living the High-Carbohydrate Way* (W. W. Norton, \$19.95). It's a sequel to her best-selling *Jane Brody's Nutrition Book*. The first half of the 600-page book presents the latest nutrition information, with emphasis on the formerly maligned complex carbohydrates: beans, whole grains, pasta and potatoes. There are chapters, too, on healthy dining out, exercise, weight control and more—all written in Brody's usual lively style.

The second half of the book contains nearly 400 recipes, most of which are fairly quick, many drawn from ethnic cuisines. There are meat as well as meatless main dishes—Brody is not a dietary purist; what she offers is a healthful style of cooking that people can live with on a daily basis.

Americans tend to think of Italian cooking as fattening—loaded with calories from pasta, rich sauces, cheese, and olive oil. Proof that it can be one of the healthiest cuisines, comes from *Eat Right, Eat Well—The Italian Way* (Alfred A. Knopf, \$19.95), a book I mentioned in an earlier column.

The book is a collaboration between Boston cardiologist and food lover Richard Wolff, M.D., and Edward Giobbi, a New York artist and author of *Italian Family Cooking*. Wolff set the low-fat, low-cholesterol guidelines for the recipes and Giobbi drew on his extensive culinary background to create more than 500 recipes.

The tasty fare here includes new-style light pasta dishes; unusual fish, poultry and veal dishes; interesting soups; and unusual vegetable dishes. No butter, whole eggs or egg yolks are

used and there's only minimal use of cheese. Full nutritional analysis is provided for each recipe.

Healthy Haute Cuisine

Want to sample the \$1500 a week spa life in the convenience of your own home? *Spa Food: The Sonoma Mission Inn Gourmet Diet* by Edward Safdie (Clarkson Potter, \$19.95) can be your guide. Here are recipes from the low-calorie (800 or 1200 per day) menus served at the exclusive Northern California health retreat. This healthy haute cuisine is an eclectic mix of California natural and dishes from around the world. Recipes are sophisticated and, in some cases, fairly time-consuming.

Rodale, publishers of *Organic Gardening, Prevention* and numerous natural foods cookbooks, have come out with a new book for painless, no-dieting weight loss: *The Lose Weight Naturally Cookbook* (\$21.95). Author Sharon Claessens emphasizes the good-guy carbohydrates, like Jane Brody. Recipes are starred with one, two or three stars to indicate their calorie level, but you need not be a dieter to enjoy them. They are creative, uncomplicated and varied, with many international dishes.

Dim Sum and More...

Steamed vegetables are synonymous with healthy cooking. Now you can learn how to steam everything from appetizers to desserts, from Chinese Dim Sum to Gingered Pears, with *The Complete Book of Steam Cookery* by Coralie Castle (J.P. Tarcher, \$16.95 and \$9.95). Recipes are not based on specific health guidelines, but many are low-fat. Author Castle says that steam cooking also retains more vitamins and minerals, lessens the need for salt, draws out the fat from meat, and saves on pot washing and cooking time. If this isn't reason enough for steam cookery, the recipes are. They come from around the world and are well spiced.

Dairy-free cuisine, mostly vegetarian (except for some fish dishes) is the focus of *The Natural Foods Cookbook* (Japan Publications, \$15.95). Author Mary Estella trained at the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, then went to Boston to study macrobiotic cooking. Estella has added flair and spice to the usually more limited macrobiotic cooking style. The more than 200 recipes are varied, but not too complicated. And you don't have to be a macrobiotic devotee to enjoy this food.

If the thought of learning more about nutrition on a monthly basis appeals, you might consider a subscription to *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. This excellent advertisement-free publication comes from Center for Science in the Public Interest (1501 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036), the consumer watchdog group which regularly pressures the government and the food industry on food safety and nutrition issues.

The current issue has a New Year's Eating quiz and an article discussing the common fast food chain practice of frying all food in beef tallow. CSPI has a campaign now to make fast food ingredient labeling mandatory. The magazine also has a regular *Healthy Cook* feature and a *Food Porn Award* for the most outrageous food product nominated by readers. CSPI also publishes educational posters, books for children, and several computer software programs.

If you're still reading this column, you're probably feeling ready for a snack—perhaps an apple or some unbuttered popcorn. Then again you may feel that your post-holidays diet or good intentions call for a treat. Chocolate mousse may be the perfect post-holidays treat, according to an article I came across last week.

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