

SNACKS

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I love to set out guacamole tacos while the soup reheats. Simply crush ripe avocado pulp with salt and hot sauce, then sandwich a spoonful in small flour tortillas (heated directly over the flame).

Admittedly, satisfying every craving proves detrimental to the waistline, but giving in once in a while keeps life enjoyable. The trick is to plan ahead for last-minute munchies — both in caloric intake and supply.

SLOW COOKER SHORT-RIB TACO SOUP

Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 6 hours
Makes: about 12 cups, 12 servings

I like to use a sauce-based taco seasoning made from tomatoes and onions rather than powdered seasoning. If taco sauce pouches are not available, substitute the dried seasoning pack (1 ounce) along with an 8 ounce can of tomato sauce.

¼ cup flour
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
2½ pounds bone-in beef short ribs
½ to ¾ pound flank steak or skirt steak, cut into 3 pieces

2 tablespoons expeller-pressed canola oil or safflower oil
1 large poblano pepper, cored, seeded, diced
1 large yellow onion, quartered, thinly sliced
3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced
1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes with juice
1 pouch (8 ounces) ground beef taco seasoning sauce
1 can (15 ounces) black beans, undrained
Garnishes:
Crumbled seasoned tortilla chips
Shredded cheese such as Monterey jack, Chihuahua or brick
Diced ripe avocado
Diced canned or fresh tomatoes
Chopped fresh cilantro
Green hot sauce
Lime wedges

1. Mix flour, salt and pepper in large bowl. Add short ribs; toss to coat. Add flank steak; toss to coat.
2. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet with deep sides over medium heat until hot. Add meat in a single uncrowded layer. Cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, 10 to 15 minutes. Transfer meat to a 4- or 6-quart slow cooker. Repeat to brown all meat.
3. Add poblano and onion to pan drippings in skillet. Cook and stir until onion is golden, 6 to 8 minutes. Add garlic; cook, 1 minute. Scrape into slow cooker. Add tomatoes, taco seasoning sauce and 3 to

- 4 cups water. (Meat should be barely covered with liquid.)
 4. Cook covered on low setting, 6 hours. Add black beans in the last hour or so. Use tongs to remove meat from slow cooker to a cutting board. Discard bones from the short ribs. Use two large forks to pull meat into shreds.
 5. Return shredded meat to slow cooker. Taste and adjust seasonings. (If desired, refrigerate covered for several days. Scrape off and discard solidified fat from surface of soup before reheating. After reheating, adjust consistency with water and then adjust seasonings with salt.)
 6. Serve in wide soup bowls topped with garnishes as desired. Pass hot sauce and lime wedges for guests to add to taste.
- Dutch oven method: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Brown meat as directed in Step 2 in the bottom of a 4- to 6-quart Dutch oven. Then remove browned meat to proceed with step 3. Return meat to Dutch oven and add remaining ingredients as directed in step 3, but increasing water to 4 or 5 cups. Bake, tightly covered, stirring once or twice, until meat is fall-apart tender, about 2 hours. Add black beans. Proceed with steps 5 and 6 to serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 180 calories, 8 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 34 mg cholesterol, 11 g carbohydrates, 2 g sugar, 14 g protein, 562 mg

sodium, 2 g fiber

PIRI PIRI CHEESE CUBES WITH KALAMATAS AND TOASTED PISTACHIOS

Prep: 10 minutes
Makes: 6 to 8 appetizer servings

Buying diced cheese makes this a very quick recipe to pull together

1/3 cup piri piri hot sauce, or other thick red (not too sweet) hot sauce
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound assorted cheese, such as cheddar, Monterey Jack and Swiss, cut into ¾-inch cubes
1 cup pitted kalamata olives, drained
½ cup roasted, salted shelled pistachio nuts, coarsely chopped

1. Mix hot sauce and oil in bottom of a glass or stainless-steel bowl. Add cheese cubes and olives; toss gently to coat. Refrigerate covered 1 hour or up to several days.
2. Serve at room temperature sprinkled with the nuts. Pass wooden picks.

Nutrition information per serving (for 8 servings): 317 calories, 27 g fat, 13 g saturated fat, 51 mg cholesterol, 3 g carbohydrates, 1 g sugar, 16 g

protein, 787 mg sodium, 1 g fiber

PRETTY-IN-PINK PICKLED EGGS

Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 10 minutes
Makes: 6 appetizer servings

I pack the eggs and beets into jars for easy late-night snacking at the fridge. Please use a fork.

6 large eggs
1 package (8 ounces) refrigerated, fully-cooked beets
1/3 cup pickle juice
1 ½ to 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
½ teaspoon herbes de provence or ¼ teaspoon each: freshly ground black pepper, dried leaf thyme, tarragon, dried lavender (optional)
Couple of pinches coarse salt

1. To hard-cook eggs, put large eggs into a deep saucepan in a single layer. Add cold water to cover by 1 inch. Put the pan over medium-high heat. Heat to a boil staying close to the stove to notice when the water comes to a boil. Count 60 seconds then turn off the heat. Set a timer for 14 minutes and let stand. Carefully tip the hot water out of the pan; add cold water to the pan and a couple of handfuls of ice cubes. Let stand until the eggs are cool.

2. To peel the eggs, pour off all the water from the pan. Shake the eggs in the pan against the sides of the pan to break the shells into little pieces. Add cold water to the pan then tip off the water. The shells will come off easily under a stream of running water. Rinse the eggs of any bits of shell. Put into a container and refrigerate covered up to several days.
3. Drain juice from packaged beets into a bowl. Stir in pickle juice, vinegar, herbs and salt. Add eggs and turn to coat them in the juices. Cut the beets into quarters and add to the bowl. Refrigerated covered at least 1 hour or up to several days.

Nutrition information per serving: 89 calories, 5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 185 mg cholesterol, 4 g carbohydrates, 3 g sugar, 7 g protein, 313 mg sodium, 0 g fiber



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HEALTHY

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If your head works like mine, don't label anything as totally off-limits. You already know what's better for you — whole ingredients, especially plants, and not processed stuff — so eat more real food. Doughnuts are OK — as is everything — eaten in moderation.

- Be a junk food snob

Cold soggy fries? Hard pass. Crisp shoestrings with just the right smattering of salt? Yes, please. If you're choosing to eat, make or buy something indulgent, make sure it's

perfect. Peanut butter cups are my No. 1 chocolate, but I'm not tempted by a smushed Reese's Christmas tree leftover. I want the classic flat round with a top as smooth as a freshly Zambonied ice rink and sharp-ridged edges. Does that make me a candy snob? Maybe. But if you're eating what you want, make sure it's exactly what you want.

- Make big batches of good stuff you can snack on anytime

It's hard to find time every day to execute full meals, so when I have extra hours, I make big batches of dishes that keep well and taste

great anytime. Some favorites include whole grains flavorful enough to eat on their own (or to serve as a grain bowl base); roasted root vegetables; well-dressed cooked vegetables that won't wilt such as green beans or kale; from-scratch dips, such as artichoke-spinach or hummus; boiled jammy eggs; and dressings to toss with salad whenever.

- Amp flavor and texture

Bland, mono-textured meals will leave you unsatisfied even if your stomach is filled. Whatever you're cooking, be sure to season it well and taste it throughout the process. Beyond salting for

seasoning, you should add a hit of acid such as fresh lemon juice and heat such as sliced, fresh chiles to make it bright and exciting; and use enough fat for it to feel rich. A final drizzle of olive oil over most dishes always helps. Umami is key in boosting flavor. It delivers the savory yum you enjoy in processed snacks but comes in natural forms such as Parmesan cheese, tomatoes, mushrooms, meat and sauces such as soy, fish sauce and Worcestershire. On top of all that flavor, build texture with crunch, such as tossing cut, crisp vegetables into the tender greens of a salad, scat-

tering nuts over soft, steamed sweet potatoes, or showering scrambled eggs with toasted bread crumbs.

SUPER

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My favorite Super Bowl of the three was in Tampa, where I was a much more integral part of The Associated Press team covering that game since I covered one of the teams, Arizona, all season. Tampa was all decked up for the event. I made a trip to a local casino, which was packed, and caught a glimpse of Kim Kardashian and Mike Ditka there (not together). The minimum blackjack bet was \$50 so I didn't stay long.

There were big projects to complete, including features profiling Kurt Warner and Larry Fitzgerald.

The Cardinals were staying at a hotel along the water and if I missed the exit I'd have to drive across a floating highway miles and miles across the bay. It was beautiful. I saw a crane swoop in and catch a fish. But it was aggravating — I did it at least twice.

This was Arizona's only Super Bowl appearance. As I explained in my previous column, the Cardinals were historically bad. From 1947, when the then-Chicago Cardinals won the NFL title, through 2007, the franchise

won one playoff game. And this Cardinal team, which finished the regular season 9-7, did not roll in with a ton of momentum. One national analyst called it the worst playoff team in NFL history. Two weeks before the playoffs started, Arizona lost at New England 47-7.

But with Warner and Fitzgerald mounting a record-breaking series of performances, the Cardinals mounted an unlikely run to the Super Bowl. They beat Atlanta in the wild card round and won handily at Carolina the following week. That's when a bit of luck helped. Philadelphia upset the New York Giants, meaning the Cardinals would host the Eagles for the NFC championship. Arizona won to set up a Super Bowl matchup with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

In that game, Arizona led 23-20 after Warner connected with Fitzgerald on a 64-yard touchdown play with 2:37 to play.

I was busy at that time writing a story about Fitzgerald being named the game's MVP, which he surely would have been had Arizona won.

But Ben Roethlisberger directed a game-winning drive, Antonio Holmes made a

tiptoe catch just inside the end zone with 35 seconds to play. Final: Steelers 27, Cardinals 23.

Holmes was named the game's MVP.

As I was rewriting on deadline, the image on my laptop screen literally flipped upside down. Other than writing while standing on my head, I was helpless. So I commandeered the laptop of a co-worker.

The AP technicians even took a photo of my screen because they'd never seen that happen before. Apparently there is a hidden command that flips the screen image upside down. Who knew?

I didn't have a lot to do at my third and final Super Bowl. My main assignment

was to cover the Pro Bowl, played in Glendale the preceding week.

But I had a great seat directly up from the goal line as Seattle, trailing 28-24, drove to the New England 1-yard line in the final minute.

You 12s all remember what happened next.

With 26 seconds left, rather than hand the ball off to Marshawn Lynch, one of the best short-yardage backs in the NFL, the Seahawks decided Russell Wilson should pass. He tossed it over the middle, where Malcolm Butler intercepted to preserve the Patriots' win.

It's a moment of agony Seahawks fans will never forget, no matter how hard they might try.

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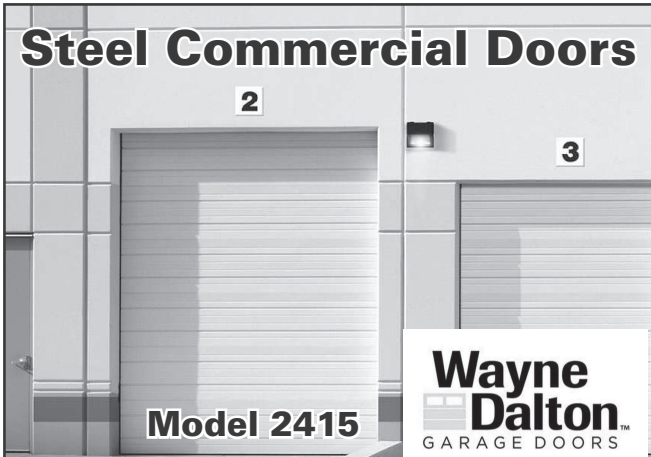
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