

Fear of needles could harm vaccination campaign

■ Experts say ubiquitous scenes of people being inoculated could hamper efforts to administer COVID-19 vaccines

Julie Appleby
Kaiser Health News

Each night it's the same. Story after story on the TV news is about the COVID vaccination effort, and they are all illustrated with footage of needles sinking into exposed upper arms.

Could those visuals, ostensibly making this all seem routine, backfire?

More than causing squeamish people to look away or change the channel, researchers say such illustrations could hamper efforts to get a broad swath of U.S. residents vaccinated.

Bottom line: Many people don't like needles, and that could further slow vaccination efforts as winter turns to spring when supplies are expected to multiply and efforts to get the hesitant to sign up for a dose will intensify.

"Fear of needles was one of the barriers that was a significant predictor of people saying, 'I don't think I will get this vaccine,'" said Jeanine Guidry, an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University who researches visual communication and conducted a survey of 500 people in July.

And it's not just TV news using what could be sensitive video footage.

Disinformation spread on social media often incorporates images of giant syringes, Guidry recently told the National Vaccine Advisory Committee, which makes recommendations to federal health officials.

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Emily Matthews/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

Fasolada is a Greek soup of dry white beans, olive oil, and vegetables.

HUMBLE & HEARTY

■ Nothing's more basic — but perfect for a healthy, hot dinner — than a pot of beans

Arthi Subramaniam
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A well-cooked pot of beans can be summed up in two words — humble and hearty.

Dried or canned beans don't need many frills to provide warmth and comfort or extra trips to specialty stores. Toss in aromatics like garlic and onion along with herbs, if you have any, and seasonings like salt, paprika, ground turmeric or garam masala.

To bulk up the dish, please vegetarians by adding carrots, peppers, tomatoes and/or greens. For a double dose of protein and flavor, simmer the beans with smoky ham hock. If you add ground meat or chunks of chuck roast or sausage, you would have a pot of chili. For a more wholesome meal, scoop the beans over some cooked rice.

Beans are rather unique as they are

embraced by both the protein and vegetable food groups. Regular consumers of meat or fish consider them to be vegetables, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but vegetarians count them first in the protein group and then in the vegetable group.

Like vegetables, beans are a good source of fiber, vitamins and minerals. But unlike vegetables, they have a substantial amount of plant-based protein.

An easy way to incorporate beans is to use the canned version, and that is fine in my opinion. Canned does not mean inferior. If you want to reduce the sodium content, rinse the beans in water to get rid of the goopy liquid. Beans are canned with salt and water to create a brine to keep them fresh. With time, however, starch from the beans makes the brine slimy.

If you are like me and have a stash of dried beans, remember it is just as effortless to cook with them. It requires only one additional step — soaking them in water. But it is often debated: to soak or not to soak. There are those who swear against soaking beans in water, saying it is a waste of time and worse, robs them of color, flavor and nutrients.

I staunchly belong in the other camp and soak them, especially ones like red kidney beans, chickpeas and fava beans, before they are cooked. The soaking not only softens and plumps up the beans but also helps to shorten their cooking time. A multigenerational tip that has been passed down in my family is to replace the water at least three or four times, while the beans soak, to alleviate flatulence.

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Charcuterie: If meat is good, why not pancakes?

■ The idea of what constitutes a charcuterie is evolving

Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

I may have this wrong, but as far as I can tell, "charcuterie" is French for "a big plate full of stuff."

Charcuteries are one of the biggest trends in the food world right now; you will find them on an ever-increasing number of restaurant menus, and small companies are popping up to bring them to you. Everyone likes them, and why not? They are big plates full of stuff.

Like so many other culinary notions, the idea of what a charcuterie is has evolved and expanded over the years, especially recently. But the original definition is still relevant: it is meat, often pork, prepared in a number of specific ways — smoked, cured, patés, terrines, sausages, confit and a couple of deboned methods.

A charcuterie board, which is what most people (and restaurants) mean when they say "charcuterie," is a platter offering several of these meats and preparations.

But that isn't nearly as fun as the current definition of the term. These days, the platter also includes a variety of well-chosen accompaniments. Cheeses, breads or crackers and a selection of complementary condiments such as preserves, pickled vegetables and more, are now considered necessary

additions to any self-respecting charcuterie board.

And with the charcuterie concept now so open and free, there is no reason to stop at meats. These days, the only limit to a charcuterie board is your imagination.

Do you like different kinds of pancakes? Make a pancake charcuterie; your brunch guests will love you for it. Or you could just go full out and make it a brunch board, with waffles, bacon, berries, scrambled eggs (keep them in the skillet for that charcuterie look) and smoked salmon with capers and tomatoes and red onions.

I'm getting kind of hungry just thinking about it.

You could make a board of sweet, juicy fruits and cheeses. Crackers and nuts would add an appealing crunch and an always welcome bit of salt, and a caramel dip would be smooth and cool.

How about a chocolate charcuterie? Why not? Don't forget the whipped cream.

Bloody Mary charcuterie boards are big now among people who like bloody Marys. Along with vodka and tomato juice, you'll need celery, Tabasco sauce, Worcestershire sauce, cheese cubes, sweet pickles and a special treat such as chilled shrimp.

Did I mention the chocolate

charcuterie? It's worthy of mentioning twice.

I recently made three charcuteries: the traditional meat-and-cheese charcuterie, a pancake charcuterie and, because I don't like bloody Marys but do like martinis, a martini charcuterie.

Meat and cheese board

For the meat and cheese platter, I wanted to emphasize contrast — flavors, textures and even colors. The prettier the plate, the more your guests will appreciate it.

For the meat part of the platter, I rolled up a selection of Italian cold cuts: Calabrese salame, capocollo, sopressata and pepperoni, plus some sliced chicken breast for people who don't like pork. I also wrapped prosciutto around chilled spears of asparagus, which is the best possible application for prosciutto.

I added cubes and wedges of fontina cheese and cubes of sharp cheddar; nothing too fancy to overwhelm the meat, which I think should be the star of the platter. Mini-breadsticks and crackers provided a backbone for the meats and cheese, with grainy mustard to add bite and cherry jam to soothe the tongue with its sweetness.

Roasted red peppers are a natural with any selection of sliced



Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

A pancake charcuterie, as prepared by St. Louis Post-Dispatch food writer, Daniel Neman.

meat, and so are piquant gherkins, so onto my plate they went. Olives are good in pretty much any circumstance, and dried apricots are now traditional with meat and cheese charcuteries.

Nuts are essential. I used pistachios in their shell (because it is so much fun taking them out of their

shells), almonds and sweet, glazed pecans. I had never bought glazed pecans before. Those things are amazing. I'm sure they would be easy to make yourself, but I took the easy route because I had two more charcuterie boards to prepare.

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