



## Healthier Food Swaps

Making smarter food choices can help you achieve your long-term health goals. Unhealthy food choices can easily become a habit, especially when life gets busy. Many packaged, fried, and processed foods are high in saturated fat, sodium, added sugars, and empty calories. While occasional indulgences are perfectly normal, eating high-calorie, low-quality foods on a regular basis can increase your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and unwanted weight gain. The good news is that there are many nutritious alternatives that can satisfy your cravings and simultaneously support your health.

Here are some healthier alternatives for popular comfort foods that you can create in your own home:

- **Instead of this:** Potato Chips (Ruffles, 1 oz) - Calories: 160, Protein: 2 g, Carbohydrates: 15 g, Fat: 10 g, Sodium: 140 mg, Cholesterol: 0 mg

**Choose this:** Air-popped popcorn (3 cups) - Calories: 93, Protein: 3 g, Carbohydrates: 18.6 g, Fat: 1.1 g, Sodium: 1 mg, Cholesterol: 0 mg.

- **Instead of this:** Ice Cream (Blue Bell, vanilla, 2/3 cup): - Calories: 240, Protein: 6 g, Carbohydrates: 27 g, Fat: 12 g, Sodium: 95 mg, Cholesterol: 50 mg

**Choose this:** Frozen banana blended with Greek yogurt - ~Calories: 120, Protein: 6-8 g, Carbohydrates: 20 g, Fat: 2 g, Sodium: 45 mg, Cholesterol: 5 mg.

- **Instead of this:** Cheeseburger (single patty, McDonald's): - Calories: 300, Protein: 15 g, Carbohydrates: 31g, Fat: 13 g, Sodium: 720 mg, Cholesterol: 40 mg

**Choose this:** Grilled turkey burger on a whole-grain bun - Calories: 250, Protein: 20 g, Carbohydrates: 20 g, Fat: 8 g, Sodium: 300 mg, Cholesterol: 40 mg.

- **Instead of this:** French Fries (medium, McDonald's): - Calories: 678, Protein: 10 g, Carbohydrates: 82 g, Fat: 34 g, Sodium: 657 mg, Cholesterol: 2 mg

**Choose this:** Oven-roasted sweet potato wedges (1 cup) - Calories: 180, Protein: 2 g, Carbohydrates: 41 g, Fat: 0.2 g, Sodium: 72 mg, Cholesterol: 0 mg.

- **Instead of this:** Chicken Nuggets (8 pieces, Chick-fil-a): - Calories: 250, Protein: 27 g, Carbohydrates: 11 g, Fat: 11 g, Sodium: 1210 mg, Cholesterol: 85 mg

**Choose this:** Baked chicken tenders with whole-wheat coating - Calories: 200, Protein: 22 g, Carbohydrates: 10 g, Fat: 5 g, Sodium: 180 mg, Cholesterol: 30 mg.

Check the food labels of some of your go-to meals and snacks, and then look for healthier alternatives. Restaurant chains with more than 20 locations typically include nutritional information for their menu items.

Knowing the nutritional content of what you eat helps you make informed decisions that are consistent with your goals. Making healthy swaps does not mean giving up the flavors you love. It simply means making informed choices and choosing better options that nourish your body and support your wellbeing.



## Rethink Your Drink

Many beverages like alcohol, sugar-sweetened drinks, specialty coffees, and energy drinks contain high amounts of added sugars, caffeine, and empty calories that offer little to no nutritional value. For example, specialty coffee drinks often contain hundreds of calories, most of which come from added sugars and fats. Energy drinks frequently exceed daily caffeine recommendations, which raises the risk of heart-related conditions. Alcohol adds empty calories, which can lead to poor sleep quality, liver damage, and sluggish metabolism over time. While these popular drinks often provide short-term enjoyment, they can lead to long-term health consequences.

If you consume beverages like these regularly, it may be time to rethink your drink. In fact, swapping out just one sugary or alcoholic beverage a day for a healthier option can result in meaningful health benefits over time.

Water remains the gold standard for hydration because it contains zero calories and naturally helps regulate body temperature, supports healthy digestion, cushions your joints, boosts mental performance, and improves skin integrity without any added ingredients. However, if you don't like water, there are plenty of flavorful alternatives that hydrate, energize, and support good health. Instead of reaching for a soda or sugary drink, try these options:

- **Water:** Zero calories, the simplest way to hydrate your body. Add natural flavor enhancers like mint leaves, fresh strawberries, or sliced cucumbers.
- **Herbal or green tea:** Rich in antioxidants, low in caffeine, and beneficial for heart and brain health. Drink hot or cold.
- **Kombucha:** Fermented tea with probiotics for gut health and a tangy, fizzy taste. Choose lower-sugar versions.
- **Functional mocktails:** Crafted from ingredients like herbs, citrus, and sparkling water, they have the feel of a cocktail without the alcohol or added sugar.
- **Electrolyte drinks:** Especially beneficial after workouts or on hot days. Choose options with electrolytes like sodium, potassium, and magnesium and without added sugar.

Cutting back on beverages with little to no nutritional value does not have to mean sacrificing flavor and enjoyment. Trying new things can help you discover new favorites that have a positive impact on your health. Choosing better beverages can give you more energy, a sharper focus, and better long-term health.



## Culinary Medicine

Culinary medicine (CM) is an emerging field that blends the art of cooking with the science of medicine. CM was developed in the early 2000s by medical professionals and chefs at Tulane University, but the concept of “food as medicine” dates back thousands of years to a physician and philosopher named Hippocrates.

Using a “food first” approach, CM can help manage—or even prevent—many health conditions. In some cases, it may also reduce the need for medications. For example, choosing anti-inflammatory foods like garlic and berries can help manage joint pain naturally and may reduce the need for pain medications. Similarly, foods that are higher in fiber and lower in carbohydrates like seeds and leafy greens can support better blood glucose levels in people with diabetes, which may reduce the amount of insulin needed. Many people are drawn to this approach because it emphasizes natural healing and sustainable lifestyle changes.

CM instructors teach basic culinary skills to increase confidence in preparing healthy meals. These include skills like how to use knives safely and effectively, how to cook with fresh ingredients, and how different cooking methods affect the nutrient content of foods.

Culinary medicine typically focuses on:

- **Whole, minimally processed foods:** Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats—as close to how they are found in nature

- **Cultural and personal preferences:** Food choices that honor family or cultural traditions and flavor preferences
- **Mindful eating:** Reconnecting with internal cues of hunger and fullness, and a heightened awareness of emotional eating triggers
- **Chronic disease prevention and management:** Emphasizing the benefits of healthy foods and reducing health risks associated with common chronic conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease
- **Hands-on cooking education:** Learning to prepare nutritious meals that are realistic for your family, lifestyle, and budget

Culinary medicine is not about perfect eating. It is about focusing on real food and making intentional choices about how you nourish your body. To find a culinary medicine specialist near you, search [The American College of Culinary Medicine's](#) directory.



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## PIZZA CASSEROLE

Pizza casserole is a nutritious and flavorful addition to your weekly menu. There's comfort in every bite. Easily tailored to your liking, you can use a range of pizza toppings to make this dish your own. It comes together quickly and bakes up in just 20 minutes making it ideal for simple dinners.

### Ingredients

- 4 cups water, for boiling pasta
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 6 ounces dry cellentani pasta
- 32 ounces low sodium marinara sauce
- 2 links turkey Italian sausage, casing removed
- 1/2 medium red bell pepper, diced
- 2 ounces pork pepperoni, quartered, few slices reserved for topping
- 1 cup reduced fat shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup sliced black olives
- 1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning, or pizza seasoning

### Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Prepare an 8×8-inch baking dish with cooking spray and set aside. Bring the water and salt to a boil in a pot over high heat. Add the pasta and boil for 8-10 minutes until al dente. Then, drain the pasta.
2. Place the pasta into a large mixing bowl. Pour in the marinara sauce and mix to combine.
3. In a skillet over medium heat, brown the sausage until no pink remains, about 7-10 minutes. Use the spatula to break it into small crumbles.
4. Stir the cooked sausage, quartered pepperoni, and bell pepper into the pasta until well combined.
5. Scrape the mixture into the prepared dish.
6. Top with an even layer of mozzarella.
7. Place whole pepperoni slices and the black olives on top of the cheese. Sprinkle with Italian seasoning. Place into the oven to bake for 25 minutes.
8. When done, the sides will be bubbling and the cheese will be browned and gooey. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

**Servings:**  
**8**



### Nutrition Facts

Calories: 246  
Carbohydrates: 26G  
Protein: 14G  
Fat: 9.3G  
Cholesterol: 28MG  
Sodium: 583MG  
Potassium: 426MG  
Fiber: 2.9G  
Sugar: 7G  
Calcium: 141MG  
Iron: 2.3MG

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Source: <https://drizzlemeskinny.com/heres-a-weight-watchers-friendly-version-of-the-pizza-casserole-everyone-is-talking-about-on-instagram/#wprm-recipe-container-35875>