

Less-but-Better Meat

Ideas for reducing the meat content of your meals

To make higher animal welfare, Freedom Food or organic meat more affordable, you can:

1. reduce the amount of meat by replacing some of it with more vegetables, pulses or other plant-based foods.
2. use less expensive or under-used parts of the animal, such as chicken wings, drumsticks or thighs; forequarter cuts of lamb, beef or pork; or even offal (see below for ideas).

The World Cancer Research Fund recommends that a serving of 80g cooked weight of meat, poultry or oily fish per person is a healthy portion size for an adult.¹ Taking into account 15-30% shrinkage, this equates to roughly 90–104g uncooked weight per portion. If serving white fish then aim for a maximum portion of 100g cooked white fish per portion (roughly 115–130g uncooked weight).

Tips for cutting down on meat

- Use dark chicken meat such as thigh – it's a lot cheaper than breast meat and people won't notice if it's in stews or casseroles. You can also use smaller pieces of meat and increase the volume with pulses such as chickpeas or beans, vegetables and sauce to reduce the cost.
- Mince. Look out for mince which uses 15% heart. Some suppliers' prices for Freedom Food mince and heart costs about the same as Farm Assured /Red tractor mince without heart. No one will notice (there is no taste difference), but if you are concerned then you can make a spicy dish like chilli con carne. To reduce the cost further, use more kidney beans and vegetables.
- Try dishes such as chilli con carne, lasagne, stir fries, pasta dishes, stews, hotpots and casseroles. For all of these you can use pulses and/or vegetables to replace some of the meat.
- Use flavoursome meat and fish, like bacon or smoked fish, sparingly. You can still get plenty of flavour with smaller amounts, and using less reduces the salt content as well as the cost.

¹ For practical guidance on portions use www.wcrf-uk.org/pdfs/portion-size-finding and <http://www.wcrf-uk.org/PDFs/Portionsposter.pdf>. World Cancer Research Fund recommends people avoid eating processed meat as a precaution as its consumption is associated with increased bowel cancer risk. See http://www.wcrf-uk.org/PDFs/processed_meat.pdf

Sample recipes

The recipes below give examples of how reduced meat dishes can work by providing less, but higher animal welfare meat. They were presented at a Good Food on the Public Plate workshop called 'Meat the Challenge' in February 2011.

Chicken and leek pot pie with a puff pastry top

Ingredients for 20 portions
1.6 kg diced chicken thigh (dark meat): free range, Freedom Food or Organic
50 ml vegetable oil
800g chopped leeks + 1 leek for cooking lentils
1.4 kg diced carrot + 2 carrots for cooking lentils
2 small onions for cooking lentils
Bay leaves/ sprig thyme for lentils and white sauce
1.6 kg cooked green lentils (800g raw weight)
2 tsp dried thyme
4 cloves garlic + 1 for cooking lentils
100g butter
100g plain flour
3.5 litres milk
2 eggs
Puff pastry for pie lid
Salt and pepper to season

Method

1. Remove pastry from the freezer and leave to defrost.
2. Cook the lentils, if they aren't already cooked, in water with mirepoix and bay leaves.
3. Fry the leeks, garlic, diced carrot and thyme in the oil for 5 minutes until soft.
4. Add the chicken and fry until the meat is sealed and lightly coloured.
5. Place the butter in a saucepan and melt, add the flour to make a roux. Add bay leaves and sprig of thyme if available. Cook out, making sure the roux does not burn.
6. Add the milk and keep stirring to avoid any lumps.
7. Add the chicken and leek mixture and green lentils to the white sauce, season with salt and pepper and allow to thicken. Remove from the heat.
8. Evenly spread the chicken mixture between 10 individual pie dishes - or on a large gastro tray/buffet service tray. Place a pastry lid on top. Brush the lid with beaten egg and place in the oven at 200c for about 35-45 minutes or until the top is golden brown.
9. Serve the pie in the dish.

How have we adapted this recipe?

- Quantity of chicken portion reduced by almost half from original recipe, meaning that higher welfare meat can be used while keeping the cost of the dish down.
- Green lentils: cheap, high in protein and add texture to the dish.

- Additional carrots: cheap, one of your five-a-day and add flavour to the dish.
- Dried thyme added for flavour.
- Serve with potatoes and dark green vegetables/ peas to give iron and other vitamins for a balanced meal.

Ginger and chilli stir fry chicken and vegetables with egg fried rice

Ingredients for 20 portions
1.6 kg diced chicken thigh (dark meat): free range, Freedom Food or Organic
800g raw peanuts
30g grated root ginger
4 chillies, deseeded and diced
120 ml vegetable oil
3 tbsp sesame oil
6 tbsp light soy sauce
1.2 kg cabbage, shredded
1.2 kg carrots, sliced
800g mushrooms, sliced
2 kg easy cook rice
1 cinnamon stick
Bay leaves
10 eggs

Method

1. Cook the rice with cinnamon stick and bay, drain well and leave to cool.
2. Heat half the vegetable oil in a wok (get the pan really hot) and fry the peanuts, chillies and garlic until the peanuts are golden brown, remove with a slotted spoon and leave to one side. Now add the chicken to the wok and cook until light brown, add the cabbage, mushrooms and carrots and stir fry lightly
3. Add the peanuts and spices to the wok and stir in the soy sauce and sesame oil. Transfer to a warm serving dish and keep hot.
4. Heat the other half of the oil in a fresh pan and fry the rice with the beaten egg. Cook for 1-2 mins until all the egg is cooked.

How have we adapted this recipe?

- Quantity of chicken reduced by half - substituted with extra peanuts and low-cost vegetables.
- Additional sugar and heavily processed sweet and salty sauces removed from recipe - replaced with a lighter soy sauce, sesame oil and fresh spices.
- Free-range egg added to rice as alternative low-cost source of protein.

3. Beef and three bean cottage pie topped with carrot and potato mash and cheese

Ingredients for 20 portions
1.6 kg minced beef, preferably organic, Red Tractor as a minimum
1.1 kg mixed beans soaked overnight and cooked (e.g. cannellini, flageolet, adzuki)
620g chopped onion + 2 small onions to cook beans
60 ml Vegetable oil
1.25 litres beef stock (use cube/bouillon powder)
4 cloves of garlic + 2 cloves to cook beans
2 tsp dried thyme
Salt and pepper to season
2.7g carrots chopped + 2 carrots to cook beans
1 leek to cook beans
Bay leaf and thyme sprig for cooking beans
6 kg potatoes, peeled and chopped
250 ml milk
370g butter
250g grated cheddar cheese

Method

1. Cook the beans until tender with mirepoix, bay and thyme (don't add salt).
2. Heat the oil in a saucepan and fry the onions, garlic and dried thyme until softened.
2. Add the minced beef and fry until browned.
3. Add 1.25 litres beef stock and cooked beans, season with salt and pepper and gently simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Transfer to an oven-proof baking dish.
5. Boil the potatoes and carrots until soft then drain well. Add the milk and butter and mash well to remove any lumps. Place on top of meat, spreading evenly across the top.
6. Sprinkle over the grated cheese and bake at 220c for 30- 40 minutes until golden brown.

How have we adapted this recipe?

- Quantity of beef significantly reduced and mixed beans added to reduce cost and improve nutritional content of dish.
- Carrots added to mash potato to increase quantity of vegetables.