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A Taste of
**FOOD AS
MEDICINE**

COOKING FOR YOUR BEST HEALTH

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WELCOME TO COOKING FOOD AS MEDICINE

Good nutrition—and your best health—starts in your kitchen!

In my earliest memories of cooking, I picture my grandmother at her wood stove and kitchen garden in Croatia—and me climbing her sour cherry trees! She was always teaching me the value of homemade food and “unsprayed” produce.

For years after graduating as a dietitian, I prescribed medical nutrition therapy to my patients. But when scientists began reporting more and more clinical trials showing the amazing health benefits of whole plant foods, I became more passionate about teaching people how to use food as medicine in a practical way.

In 2009, I started running Culinary Medicine Cookshops from the demo kitchen at my Sydney clinic. This was not to replace important clinical nutrition interventions, but as an extra service to help patients connect their nutrition prescriptions with delicious healing meals they could make easily at home. Since then we have had the pleasure of hosting more than 86 events with 1720 attendees!

What have I discovered?

Learning about how to enjoy the foods you should eat can be your motivator for change. And understanding what they can do for you can make all the difference.

Often at my Cookshops, doctors excitedly say they have learned more in one night about how to eat to fight chronic disease than in their entire medical training, and leave inspired to improve their lifestyle.

Cooking food as medicine will help you have a better quantity and quality of life by eating real, tasty foods that attack the silent, deadly disease processes driven by poor diet. Applying the findings from nutrition science can vastly reduce the need for drugs and surgery, and help prevent or even reverse the chronic diseases that kill too many of us.



Harnessing lifestyle medicine

While there is a place for more drastic measures when necessary, we have become too reliant on drugs and surgery. Many people miss out on the great benefits afforded by simple lifestyle improvements. Adding more natural plant foods to every plate could help you defer or avoid many health problems. Here are two examples.

HEART DISEASE

Your heart is very forgiving. Research shows adults can undo their heart-disease risks by improving their lifestyle. One interesting study tracked 5000 young adults over a period of 20 years to see if adopting a greater number of healthy habits could influence the thickening and calcification of two major arteries in their body supplying blood to the brain and the heart. The scientists discovered a link with less clogging of the arteries for each positive lifestyle change. But giving up healthy lifestyle habits, such as no longer following a healthy diet, was associated with more arterial thickening and hardening. Such changes are a strong predictor of heart attack and stroke risk in middle age. Adulthood is not a “safe place” to abandon healthy habits, but to continue to improve them.

In people at high risk of heart attack and stroke, a Mediterranean-style diet, supplying 30 grams (1 oz) of nuts daily, was able to delay the hardening and plaque accumulating in the main artery that supplies blood to the brain, compared to a lower-fat diet without additional nuts, which allowed blocking of this artery to progress, according to data over a two-year period from the PREDIMED study.

The sooner you can get your family started the better. A small study from the Cleveland Clinic found that nine measures of heart and blood-vessel disease were improved in very overweight children after just four weeks on a total plant-based diet (in this case low fat, with proportionally lower calories). These included Body Mass Index (BMI), cholesterol, systolic blood pressure and CRP, a broad marker of inflammation in the body.

CANCER

Cancer cases are forecast to increase by 75 per cent during the next two decades, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Treatment alone is not enough; preventive measures are essential. Research published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* on more than 500,000 people followed up for 13.6 years found those who adhered more closely to the American Cancer Society cancer-prevention guidelines had a significantly lower risk of developing cancer or dying from it, and a reduced risk of death from any cause. The researchers concluded that after giving up smoking, sticking to a set of healthy behaviours relating to diet, alcohol, body weight and physical activity is paramount.

Dr Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in California, wanted to find out if lifestyle changes over a one-year period, including a total plant-based diet, could make some difference to low-grade prostate cancer in men who chose to forego medical treatment and its undesirable side effects. Dr Ornish found that men who renovated their diet and lifestyle experienced a 4 per cent drop in their PSA (prostate specific antigen) level, whereas those in a “usual care” group, who didn’t receive intensive lifestyle advice, had a 6 per cent rise, suggesting their disease was progressing. Further, serum from the men who received lifestyle medicine blocked the growth of prostate cancer cells in a test tube eight times more powerfully compared to serum from the “usual care” group.

Later follow-up of the men in this study also showed those who made comprehensive lifestyle changes had a significantly improved relative length of their telomeres. Why is this important? Telomeres exist on the end of your chromosomes inside your genes and telomere shortening in humans is a marker of disease and ageing. If we could prevent telomere shortening, we’d be able to stop getting old!

So, if you or I were a cancer survivor or facing another life-threatening disease, we would all want top-quality blood coursing through our body to help slow disease. The “secret” is a natural plant-based diet. Advances in radiation, chemotherapy and surgery may continue to make progress in treating cancer. But plant-based diets will be essential in the future as the safest way to reduce the risks and impacts of cancer.

Preparing a healthy plate

Many people are trying to eat better to improve their wellbeing. A 2010 Australian survey indicated 70 per cent of people consumed some plant-based meals in the belief that eating less meat and more plant foods improves health. Even high-end restaurants are starting to develop menus focusing on seasonal vegetables. They are pushing meat from the centre of the plate and sometimes off it altogether!

*Meat no longer needs to be the main event.
Vegetables should have a starring role.*

If protein is your concern, the truth is you can get all the protein you need from plants (page 22). You don’t need to eat red meat, chicken or seafood every day. Protein exists in legumes, wholegrains, nuts, seeds and even vegetables—and it adds up over the day.

So what could a healthy meat-free plate look like?

My “Healthy Eating Plate” will give you an idea. You can use it whether you want to adopt a flexitarian approach—including meat on occasions—or go vegetarian.





"The early years are key to teaching kids about healthy and unhealthy foods."

MUSHROOMS

Generally thought of as a vegetable, mushrooms and fungi belong to their own food kingdom. I love mushrooms for their meaty texture and earthy flavour due to the naturally high glutamate content. When using mushrooms in recipes, you can get away with less salt, yet achieve a robust flavour.

Mushrooms are very low calorie (eating them has been linked with a lower BMI), low carb, high fibre (good for satiety) and gluten-free. They are also one of the foods that can supply beta glucan (which lowers elevated cholesterol) and an antioxidant called ergothioneine, which your body can't make. Ergothioneine is used by the body as an important "back up" when other internal antioxidants become depleted.

You can now buy "Vitamin D mushrooms." These are useful for any plant-based diet because vitamin D is not usually found in non-animal-based foods. However, despite previous marketing campaigns suggesting otherwise, mushrooms are *not* a good source of active vitamin B12 for the human body. If you are vegan or a vegetarian, enjoy mushrooms but make sure you also include other fortified food sources of vitamin B12 and/or take a supplement.

What excites me most about mushrooms is their food-as-medicine potential. Mushrooms contain some unique phytonutrients that might boost immunity. They seem to do this by encouraging a greater diversity of the microbiota in your gut. Mushrooms might be helpful for autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, because of their anti-inflammatory and immune-modulating effects. Some animal studies show mushrooms might delay cognitive decline and the onset of dementia. Newer research shows vegetables, legumes and mushrooms are also linked with a lower risk of gout. Mushrooms are currently being studied for their anti-cancer properties, especially with regard to breast and prostate cancer.

The good news is that these benefits don't only apply to more exotic varieties but to the common white button mushrooms as well. You also don't need to eat buckets of mushrooms to gain protection. Just one mushroom daily, on average, is linked with a more than 50 per cent reduced risk of breast cancer in a study comparing the food intakes of women with and without cancer.

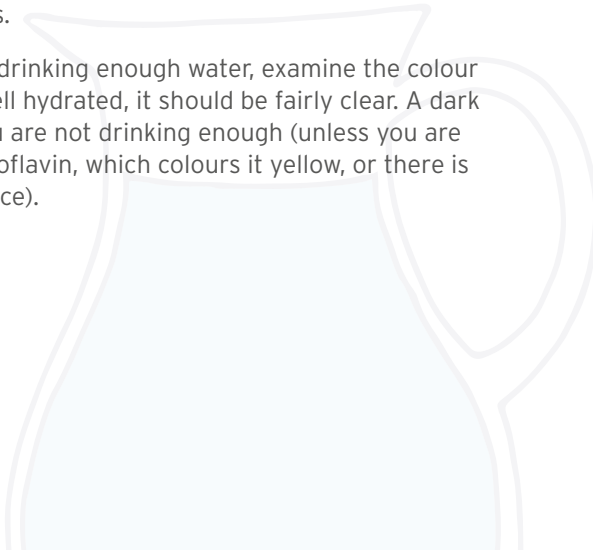
PURE WATER

Research shows that being dehydrated by only 1-2 per cent (lacking as little as 400 ml of fluid) can make you feel tired and less alert. Yet pure water (which you can freely source from the tap in most developed countries and filter if desired) can help prevent fatigue, keep your skin moist, and enhance physical and mental functioning. Getting enough water will also help your bowels move, reduce the risk of kidney stones and may even prevent overeating, since many people mistakenly confuse hunger for thirst.

The latest evidence suggests pure water is also critically important to protect against some more serious diseases. Drinking at least six glasses of water daily, as compared to one glass, cuts the risk of bladder cancer by half in men, according to one observational study from Harvard University. Drinking at least five glasses daily, as compared to two or less reduces the risk of dying from heart attack by 40-50 per cent, according to research on a large population of Seventh-day Adventists published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*. Surprisingly, other fluids like juices or tea were not protective.

The National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia recommends drinking at least eight cups of fluid each day if you are a woman. If you are a man who is physically active, drink at least 10 cups daily. Based on the available research, now linking water deficiency to chronic disease, I would suggest pure water for at least five of your daily fluid cups.

To check whether you are drinking enough water, examine the colour of your urine. If you are well hydrated, it should be fairly clear. A dark yellow colour suggests you are not drinking enough (unless you are taking a supplement of riboflavin, which colours it yellow, or there is some other dietary influence).



RECIPES

A delicious way to eat more vegetables. The creamy dressing is an ideal swap for mayonnaise and can be used to flavour any salads and tenderly cooked grains. Tahini is made from sesame seeds and actively lowers cholesterol. Turmeric supplies the anti-inflammatory phytonutrient curcumin, which has been shown to enhance the efficacy of chemotherapy and radiotherapy in the treatment of cancers.

ROASTED VEGETABLE SALAD WITH CREAMY ORANGE TAHINI DRESSING

PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES, COOKING: 45 MINUTES, SERVES 6

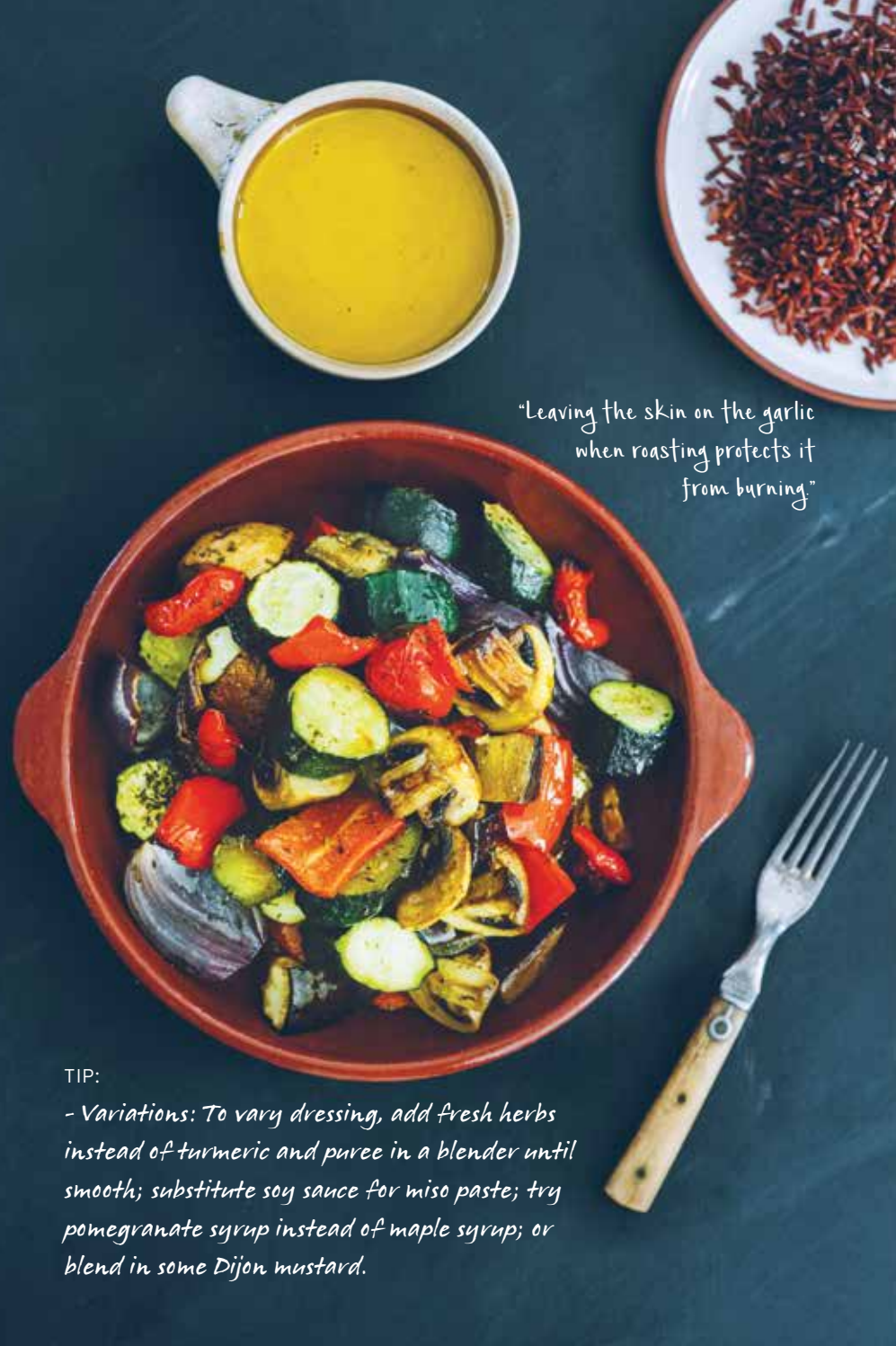
- 4 medium zucchinis (courgettes), sliced on a slant into 2.5-centimetre (1-inch) pieces**
- 4 large field mushrooms, chopped into large chunks**
- 2 red Spanish onions, peeled and quartered**
- 1 medium eggplant (aubergine), cut into large cubes**
- 6 cloves garlic, unpeeled**
- 1 red capsicum (bell pepper), cut into large chunks**
- 4 sprigs dried oregano**
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil**

Dressing

- 3 tablespoons orange juice (approximately ½ juiced orange)**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- 2 tablespoons tahini**
- 2 teaspoons shiro (white) miso paste**
- 1½ teaspoons natural maple syrup**
- 1 small garlic clove, crushed**
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric**

- 1.** Pre-heat oven to 200°C (390°F).
- 2.** Line 2 oven trays (or baking dishes) with parchment (baking) paper and distribute prepared vegetables. Drizzle with oil, gently toss with fingers and place sprigs of oregano over the top, crushing them lightly.
- 3.** Roast vegetables for 45-60 minutes until softened and slightly browned.
- 4.** Meanwhile, place all dressing ingredients in a glass jar with screw-top lid and shake vigorously until blended.
- 5.** Transfer vegetables to a serving platter and place dressing in a small jug to the side. Enjoy salad warm, as a side dish or main course on top of soft polenta or tenderly cooked grains. Dressing can be stored in the fridge for several days.

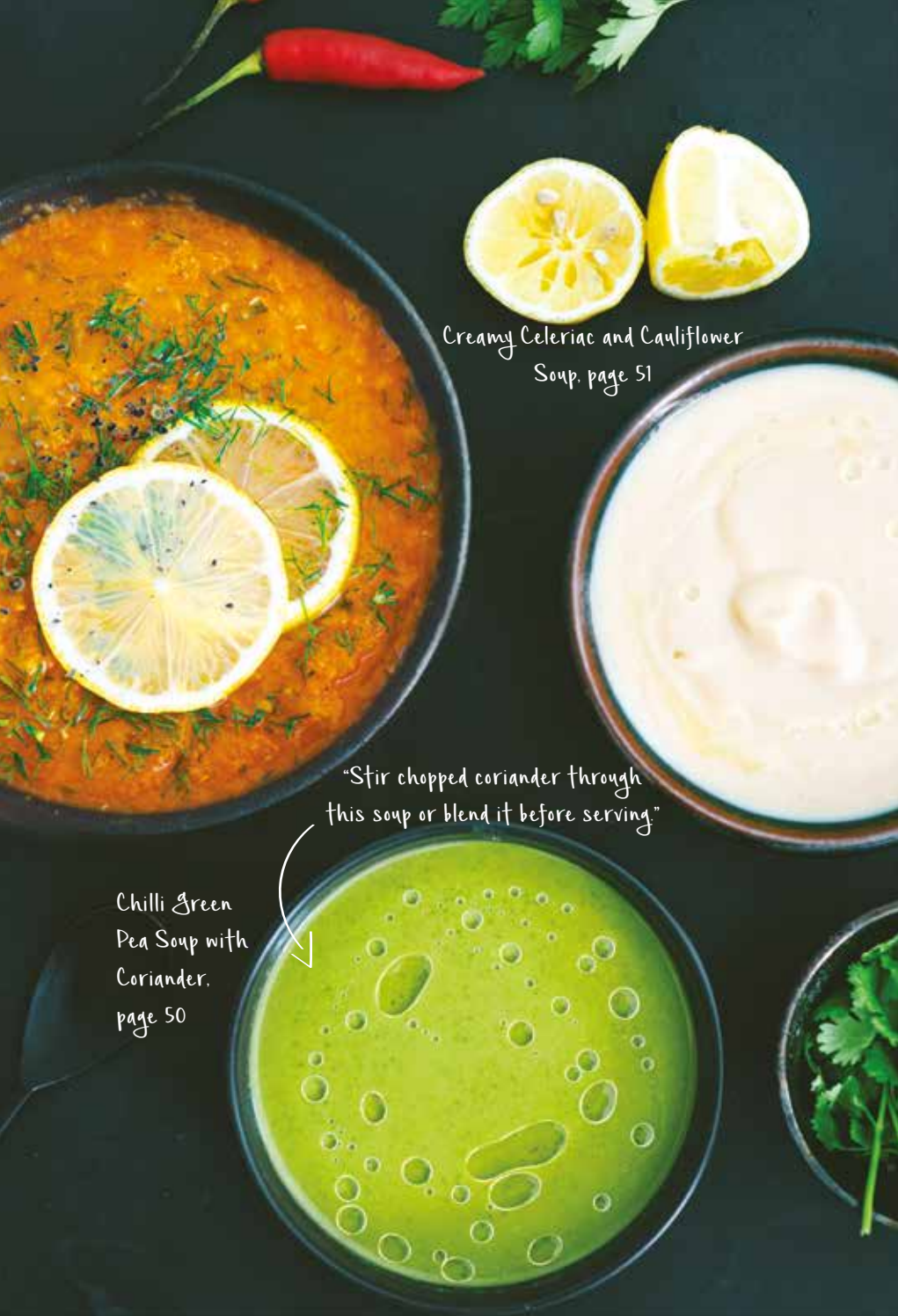
Per serve: energy 918 kJ (219 Cal); protein 6 g; fat 17 g; saturated fat 3 g; cholesterol 0 mg; carbohydrate 8 g; sugars 6 g; fibre 5 g; calcium 60 mg; iron 1.4 mg; sodium 91 mg



“Leaving the skin on the garlic when roasting protects it from burning.”

TIP:

- Variations: To vary dressing, add fresh herbs instead of turmeric and puree in a blender until smooth; substitute soy sauce for miso paste; try pomegranate syrup instead of maple syrup; or blend in some Dijon mustard.



Creamy Celeriac and Cauliflower Soup, page 51

"Stir chopped coriander through this soup or blend it before serving."

Chilli Green Pea Soup with Coriander, page 50

This low-GI soup provides an excellent source of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory phytonutrients—perfect for people with insulin resistance or diabetes. It's one of my favourite meals-in-a-bowl. Red lentils disintegrate with cooking, so they might be the best "gateway" legume. Just add a handful to any soup recipe and nobody knows!

SWEET POTATO, RED LENTIL AND LEMON SOUP

PREPARATION: 10 MINUTES, COOKING: 40 MINUTES, SERVES 4

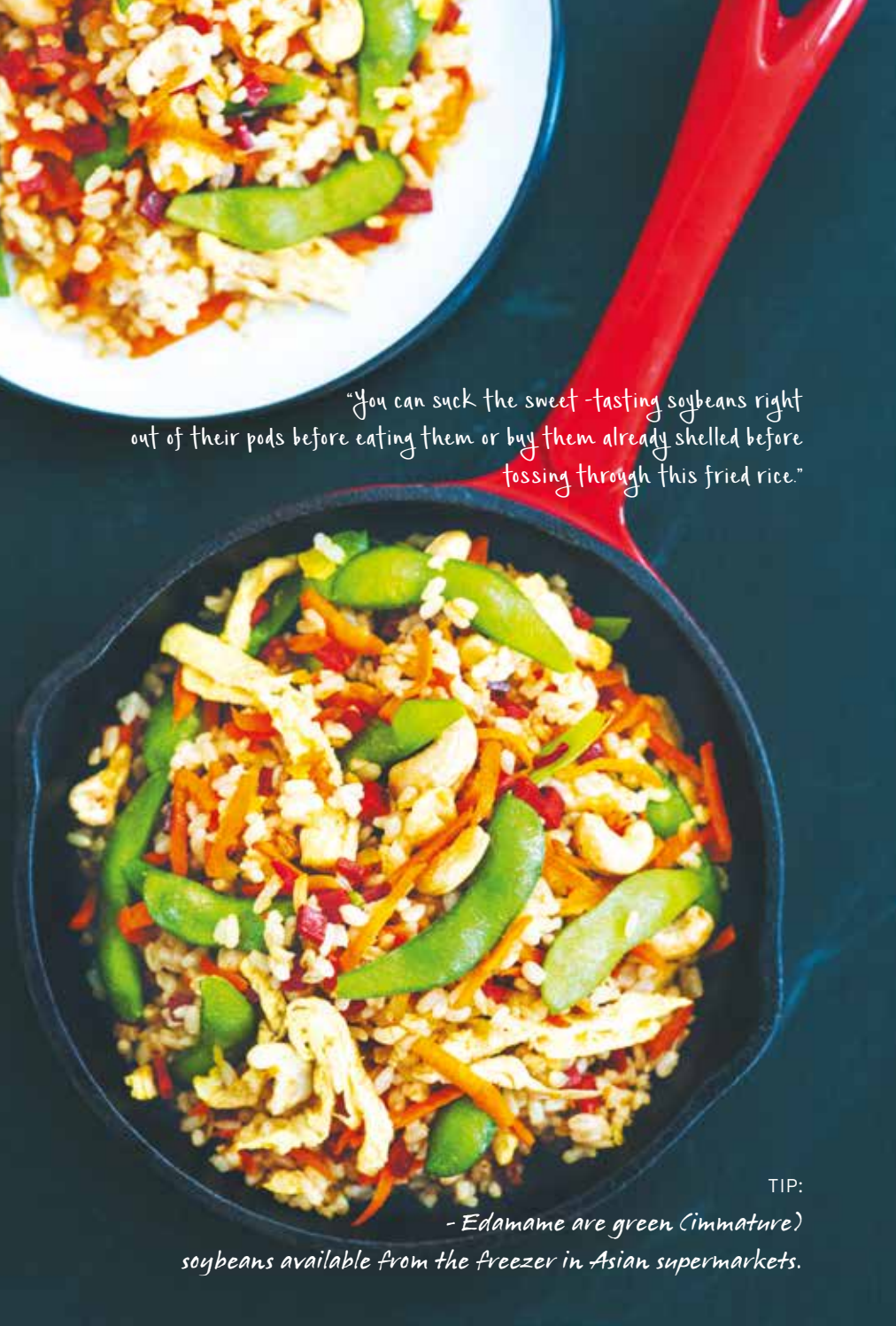
- 200 g (7 oz) red lentils, picked over for stones and rinsed**
- 1 x 10 g (½ oz) chicken-style vegetable stock cube, crumbled**
- 1 large onion, peeled and roughly chopped**
- 400 g (14 oz/1 medium) sweet potato, peeled and roughly chopped**
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled**
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- 1 cup tomato pasta sauce**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill**
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice**

- 1.** Place washed lentils in a large saucepan with 5 cups of water and stock cube, and bring to boil. Skim the white foam that appears on the surface of the soup and simmer, half-covered, for about 15 minutes or until you prepare the other ingredients.
- 2.** Blend onion, sweet potato and garlic in a food processor until vegetables are finely chopped.
- 3.** Heat oil in a large frypan and add chopped vegetables, cumin and tomato pasta sauce in turn, sautéing for 10 minutes.
- 4.** Add sautéed vegetables to pot of boiling lentils and simmer for a further 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until flavours amalgamate.
- 5.** Mix in dill and lemon juice and serve hot with some grainy or rye bread. Soup freezes well and the flavour continues to improve. To garnish, top each portion with a round slice of lemon.

TIP:

- Use up any over-ripe tomatoes you might have sitting on the bench, by chopping them and adding to this soup.

Per serve: energy 1855 kJ (443 Cal); protein 16 g; fat 21 g; saturated fat 3 g; cholesterol 0 mg; carbohydrate 44 g; sugars 15 g; fibre 11 g; calcium 97 mg; iron 5.3 mg; sodium 624 mg



"You can suck the sweet-tasting soybeans right out of their pods before eating them or buy them already shelled before tossing through this fried rice."

TIP:

- Edamame are green (immature) soybeans available from the freezer in Asian supermarkets.

Make this flavoursome dish whenever you have leftover brown rice. Apart from being a healthy wholegrain, brown rice is ideal to use as the grains don't stick together. The recipe is perfect for a light meal with a green salad or you can serve it as a side dish.

CASHEW FRIED RICE

PREPARATION: 7 MINUTES, COOKING: 13 MINUTES, SERVES 4

2½ cups cooked medium-grain brown rice

1 egg, optional

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil + 1 teaspoon

1 small onion, finely chopped

½-1 small red chilli, deseeded, finely chopped

1 clove garlic, crushed

4 rashers imitation (soy) bacon, chopped into small pieces

1 medium carrot, peeled and grated

½ cup frozen shelled edamame

¼ cup cashews

2 teaspoons salt-reduced soy sauce

2 teaspoons extra virgin sesame oil

1. If using egg, make an omelette by whisking egg with a fork and pouring into a hot pan or wok to which you have added 1 teaspoon of oil. Cook omelette on both sides. Remove from the pan and slice into thin strips. Set aside.

2. Heat oil in the same pan, and sauté onion, chilli and garlic. Add imitation bacon and cook until bacon becomes slightly crispy. Add carrot and edamame, and cook for a further few minutes.

3. Toss in cooked brown rice, cashews, soy sauce, sesame oil and strips of omelette. Lightly fry until flavours combine. Serve hot or refrigerate and use within a few days.

TIP:

- If you don't have leftover rice in the fridge or freezer, cook 1 cup of rice using a rice cooker or the absorption method. Spread on a tray and cool in the fridge before using. Rice blends-combinations of red, brown and black rice-also work well.*
- Raw cauliflower rice can be substituted for cooked rice. Simply pulse cauliflower in a food processor until it resembles rice grains.*
- Imitation bacon is made from soy protein and available from supermarkets.*

Per serve: energy 1654 kJ (395 Cal); protein 10 g; fat 20 g; saturated fat 3 g; cholesterol 1 mg; carbohydrate 41 g; sugars 3 g; fibre 5 g; calcium 32 mg; iron 2.1 mg; sodium 226 mg

Here's what you should give them when the kids call for ice-cream! You can also use other frozen fruit, such as mango, or add in some berries. This recipe needs to be started the day before. It is the perfect way to use up over-ripe bananas.

REAL BANANA ICE-CREAM

PREPARATION: 15 MINUTES + FREEZING, COOKING: 0 MINUTES, SERVES 4

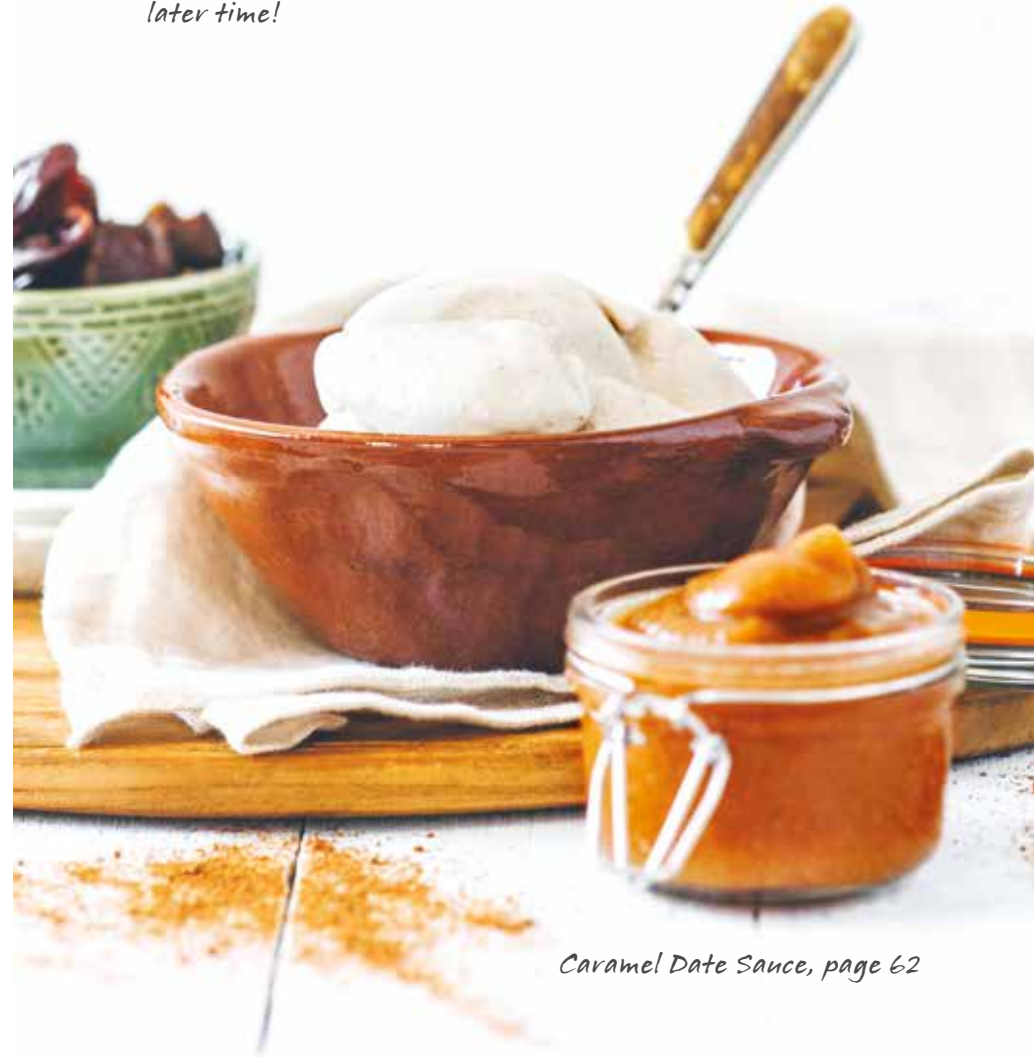
4 over-ripe bananas, peeled
¼ teaspoon cinnamon, nutmeg or wattleseed
¼ teaspoon alcohol-free pure vanilla extract

1. Slice or break up bananas into small chunks of even size, place in a glass container then freeze until solid, preferably overnight.
2. Remove bananas from freezer and defrost for 5-10 minutes. Place into a food processor with remaining ingredients and puree until a smooth ice-cream-like texture is formed.
3. Scoop immediately into small bowls or re-freeze for later use.

Per serve: energy 360 kJ (86 Cal); protein 1 g; fat 0 g; saturated fat 0 g; cholesterol 0 mg; carbohydrate 19 g; sugars 16 g; fibre 2 g; calcium 6 mg; iron 0.3 mg; sodium 0 mg

TIPS:

- For extra flavour, drizzle with passionfruit pulp or maple syrup just before serving.
- Whenever you notice over-ripe (or blackened) bananas in your fruit bowl, simply peel and slice, then place in the freezer. Perfect for making ice-creams and smoothies at a later time!



Caramel Date Sauce, page 62



Winner, "Best Health and Nutrition Cookbook"
Gourmand World Cookbook Awards (2017)