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The Smart Grill!

By June M. Lay, Lifestyle Columnist - HealthNewsDigest.com
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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - Memorial Day Weekend is behind us and for many of us it marked the beginning of summer using our grills. Grilling is popular because it's easy, tastes good (I can almost smell it as I write) and fun to do (we women get to watch men do the cooking!). Now that we've been discussing the Mediterranean Diet with its staple foods high in plant based foods and lower in meat than our American Diet, this may be the perfect time to look at what makes a smart grill. The great news is that grilling is generally a lower fat cooking method than other methods such as sautéing and frying. The bad news is that without a few precautions, grilling presents a potential long term health hazard. So, let's grill as a low fat cooking method, but let's do it smartly for our health.

Okay, let's discuss how to grill our food as safely as possible because unfortunately, grilling meat particularly red meat carries with it a risk factor for cancer. Research points to a higher incidence of colon and prostate cancers in particular. In fact, this year's report on grilling from the AICR states, "diets high in red meat (beef, pork and lamb) and especially processed meats (such as hot dogs) are now a convincing cause of colorectal cancer". When we cook meat at high temperatures, it creates compounds called "Heterocyclic amines" (HCAs) and "Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons"(PAHs) . These compounds are powerful cancer-causing agents in animals, and research indicates that they are carcinogenic to us humans as well. They are formed when fat from the meat drips down on to the hot coals or any hot grill heating element, causing smoke to rise back on to the food. These cancer causing compounds also form directly on the food when we char meat (it's tasty, so sorry for the bad news!).

"A diet high in grilled and barbequed meat cooked over an open flame or even pan fried may possibly increase our risk of stomach, colon and rectal cancers according to the "American Institute for Cancer Research"(a direct quote).

Okay, we're not about to give up our grilled foods, so what can we do?

Let's:

Grill using a pan. This is safer than cooking the meat directly over an open flame.

Not over-grill meats. Let's avoid grill flare ups and eating overly -charred meats (I know this is the best part, but it's our health!).

Reduce the number of times per week we eat grilled meat. Grill almost every night in the summer? Let's try skipping a night or two.

Marinate! Research shows that marinating our meats before grilling reduces the formation of HCA's when we use an oil free marinate (less calories, so we kill two birds at one time!). Want to add some herbs with antioxidant properties to the marinate to help protect against these cancer compounds? Based upon initial research a few are: oregano, rosemary, garlic, mustard seeds (please note dried herbs are not regulated for potency and fresh herbs are what I recommend).

Cut visible fat off meat. This will reduce those dangerous- to -our health flare-ups.

Eat more grilled veggies! Yes, "Go Mediterranean" by grilling veggies, because these dangerous compounds do not form when we grill vegetables or fruits. Veggies also have those wonderful cancer fighting phytochemicals protective to our health. We can bulk up our pasta dishes with grilled veggies including lightly grilled tomatoes!

Eat more grilled fish and lean skinless chicken than grilled red meat which results in less HCA's formed.

So, let's enjoy this low fat method of cooking, but let's just make it a "Smart Grill". And let's not forget, that just because we can't see these compounds, or because we don't have an immediate reaction to them, that they aren't dangerous to our health.

Here's to The Smart Grill!

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Source for more info: American Institute for Cancer Research.
Check out this week's "Go Mediterranean" Grilled Veggie recipe for at http://www.junefit.com/tips_recipehp.htm and for info on my olive oil choice.

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Check out a great site www.americantowns.com A source for local community events, news, real estate, restaurants and more (and where you'll find my tips under community health, of course!).

Source for herbs include: Mosby's Handbook of Herbs & Natural Supplements, and Anti-proliferative and antioxidant properties of rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis* in *Oncol Rep.* 2007 Jun;17(6):1525-31

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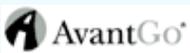




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