

Nutrition for Fitness and Sports Lifestyles

FAST COOKING TECHNIQUES

Pan-Broil A quick cooking, dry heat method performed on the stove top by cooking in a frying pan, using little or no fat, over moderately high heat. The food sears on the surface and pulls away from the pan; any fat given off by the food is poured away during cooking. A special pan, called a grill pan, is specifically designed for pan-broiling. On the inside it has a ridged bottom so that the food is raised up and fat drips below. A heavy grill pan made of a material that conducts heat well, such as a cast iron, does the best job.

Pan-fry A dry heat cooking method that cooks food in a small amount of hot fat. The terms panfry and sauté are often used interchangeably, but strictly speaking, less fat is used to sauté food than to panfry food.

Saute The same technique as stir-frying, sauté, from the French sauté (to jump), means to rapidly cook small, uniformly sized pieces of food over high heat in oil or fat in a specially designed straight-sided, shallow pan with an extra long handle. To keep the food from sticking, the pan is kept in constant motion, so the food “jumps” in the pan. More typically, sautéed food is turned rather than tossed. Any skillet made of material that conducts heat well can be substituted for a sauté pan. When the food is browned on all sides, it is removed from the pan, set aside, and kept warm while the juices are made into an accompanying sauce. Deglazing removes caramelized bits of food from the bottom of the pan and incorporates them into the liquid that is the base for the sauce.

Stir-fry To cook bite-sized pieces of meats and vegetables quickly over high heat in a small amount of oil. Sauteeing and stir-frying are basically the same technique; the difference between them is primarily cultural. Stir-fried preparations, reflecting the Asian palate, include many vegetables. Dairy products, so important in the sauces used with French sautés, are not used. In stir-frying, the food is cooked by both the heat of the pan and the heat carried by the oil. As the name implies, the ingredients are stirred in the pan almost constantly during cooking so they cook evenly. It is an ideal way to preserve the colors, flavors, and textures of food, and to maintain nutritional value as well. The cooking pan, a wok, is slope-sided and deep, and requires less oil than does a sauté pan or skillet. Less fat means that foods have fewer calories than other fried foods. Each piece of meat or vegetable gets immersed in the small pool of oil that collects in the bowl of the wok and is quickly seared and cooked. However, if you don't have a wok, a large skillet or electric skillet can be substituted. Bear in mind, however, that the flat-bottomed skillet will require more oil to keep the food from sticking.