

What makes a good meal essay

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A good meal is one that has the desirable qualities which can distinguish it from ordinary meals (American Heritage Dictionary). Therefore, a good meal should be tasteful, healthy and nicely served. This includes all the processes for the preparation of food – from selecting the ingredients, cooking, garnishing and serving the food – giving considerations to the time and environment, wherein the meal is supposed to be served. Making a good meal starts by the selection of ingredients.

Always select canned and dried food first. Cans should be intact (e. g. no bulging, leaking or dentations) upon purchase, in addition, one should always be mindful of the expiration date of the product. Dry goods (e. g. spices) should be kept in air-tight containers to keep the flavor and aroma. After buying canned and dried goods, next purchase should be made for vegetables and herbs.

In buying vegetables, make sure that they are fresh, vividly green and without any yellow patches. They should be packed according to same kinds. And finally, the last that should be bought are perishable foods like meat, fish and poultry. These goods should be kept refrigerated to ensure the freshness. Any purchase that is felt warm to touch or packed in a leaking package should be discarded. Once at home, preparation of the meal starts by proper handling. The main purpose of this is to prevent possible food poisoning that may result from growth of bacteria. Therefore, always keep the food in the refrigerator, keep everything clean and avoid soiling readily prepared ingredients with other ingredients like fish or meat.

Marinating serves the purpose of tenderizing meat so it cooks faster and becomes juicier. The basic elements of a marinade includes mixture of vinegar and/or lemon juice, finely chopped onion, herbs and spices. Additional elements are added according to what is marinated – example, yogurt or wine for poultry; olive oil for fish and soy sauce for meat. Spices such as dried parts of aromatic plants, except the leaves, can be as hot as dried hot chilies, black or white pepper or ginger, they can also be as mild as dry coriander. Fresh herbs like basil, mint, parsley and spices are served to change basic foods into flavored ones. The best marinating methods is to put the marinade and the ingredient in a nylon bag, mix well then squeeze to get the air out, tightly seal and put in the refrigerator for 2-4 hours.

A good delicious meal does not necessarily mean that it should be unhealthy. A report released by the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Institutes of Health; stated five rules for a healthy diet namely: (1) a variety of food, mostly of plant origin should be included; (2) a meal must include starch in the form of bread, rice, pasta or cereals; (3) a meal should have low fat content (30% of the total calories needed); (4) intake of sugars should be kept to a minimum and (5) women are particularly encouraged to consume low fat dairy products to combat osteoporosis (Tanne, 1999). Cooking methods may vary, they can include baking, boiling, grilling, roasting and steaming.

Choosing a particular method depends on the flavors and nutrients one wants to keep without adding or consuming extra amounts of fat. Baking is

used for cooking bread, potato and sweet potato in addition to poultry and fish. Baked food is better than fried because fried food usually contributes to cholesterol build up in the heart. Foods suitable for boiling may include vegetables, meat, stocks, fish, soups, eggs, and flour based food such as pasta. Boiling is safe and simple, plus it is more appropriate for large amounts of ingredients to be cooked. Boiling can also tenderize older and tougher cuts of meat, making it more digestible.

Boiling meat produces flavorful stock suitable for sauces and soups while boiling vegetables retain nutrients as long as boiling time is minimum. Steaming is more applicable to health conscious individuals because this method of cooking only requires steam. Steaming primarily lessens the fat content of food because it does not require cooking oil.

Fewer nutrients are also taken away from food since it does not directly require in the process. Steaming starts by boiling water in a steamer and letting it evaporate in to steam, the heat from the evaporated water then circulates within the steamer thereby cooking the food. Grilling is also as versatile as baking and boiling since numerous food products can also be cooked this way. Grilling is the easiest way of cooking since it involves high temperatures of heat from coal, gas, wood and /or infrared and food simply placed over the source of heat. Commonly grilled foods include meat, fish, chicken, pork chops, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, corn, shrimp, squid, and sausages.

Cooking meat at high temperatures, however, contribute to the formation of heterocyclic amines which can cause cancer (Sugimura, Wkabayashi,

Nakagama & Nagao, 290). Roasting meanwhile is done in open flames, ovens or other heat sources to cook food. Roasting usually enhances flavors of food through caramelization of sugar in the surface. Food to be roasted is placed on a rack, roasting pan, or in a rotisserie for even exposure to heat.

Hot air circulates around the meat cooking all sides equally. Roasting differs from grilling in terms of meat since grilled meat is spiced by wet ingredients through the process of marinating. The concluding step of preparing a good meal is in the food presentation. It does not only cover garnishing and preparing the plate, but it should satisfy the five senses of the guest. The sense of sight can be complemented by garnishing the plate, the table cloth, and possibly the table itself, in the form of flowers and/or candles.

Accompanying easy listening music should sooth the sense of hearing.

Touch can be complimented by the utensils. Smelling the aroma of the food stimulates the guest's appetite and tasting the meal and the served beverage is the most important of all since it will measure the guest's ultimate satisfaction. The most important single item is garnishing the plate and it should start by the ingredients of the meal itself with regards to color texture of sauces and fresh green or colored vegetables added at the end. In addition, the rim or edge of the plate can be decorated by using a pate of red, yellow and green pepper or use cut pieces of vegetables (carrot, potato, or green beans) that geometrically match the main dish in the plate. Always keep in mind that the additions should add color, flavor and preferably

nutritious value to the meal. To apply the principles described I shall describe how to make a good vegetable stuffed fish fillet meal.

Selection: A good fish fillet is characterized by being moist, firm and elastic. It should have a fresh mild odor (fish odor comes with time). It should have fresh non colored or dry cut edges.

Choose fish fillet of approximately 1 inch thickness. It can be of white fish (tilapia) or otherwise. Preparation: If fish fillet is bought frozen, it should be allowed to thaw gradually. Avoid thawing in room temperature. One can immerse the package into cold water for an hour as an alternative for quicker thawing. After proper cleaning of the fillet, it is to be marinated. The marinade is composed of 3 table spoons (tbsp) of fresh orange juice, 2 tbsp of fresh lemon juice, 2 tbsp of olive oil, 1 clove garlic (finely chopped) and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Immerse the fish fillet into the marinade, put in a nylon bag, get the air out, firmly seal and put in the fridge for 2-4 hours.

The stuffing is composed of 1 root of carrot, 1 head of radish, 4 spring onions, Italian parsley, green coriander and few leaves of fresh mint. All are very finely chopped. Salt and freshly ground black pepper is added. Cooking: Spread a piece of fish filet, put some of the stuffing 1 inch away from the end.

Roll the fish fillet to include the stuffing. If it rests with difficulty, one can “pin” it with a sharp toothpick. Repeat the procedure for other fish fillet pieces. Put all in a non-stick tray brushed with olive oil. Bake in a preheated

oven at 420-450 F for 10-12 minutes, half the time for each side. Baking fish fillet takes 10 minutes per inch, so cooking time is related to the thickness of the piece of fillet. Serving: A cooked stuffed fish fillet can be served on top of finely chopped radish leaves and topped with a 1-2 tbsp mixture of fresh lemon juice, olive oil (extra-virgin), finely grated lemon zest and few tightly packed fresh Italian parsley leaves and chopped rosemary leaves and cut small pieces of red pepper.

The dish can be served with steamed carrots and long green beans or baked potatoes or cooked long grain rice. The meal is served with white wine and is to be presented hot.