

All stirred up

If you want fast food that's healthy and delicious, whip out your wok – stir-fries are the easy way to pack in your nutrients

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Crammed with crunchy vegetables, stir-fries are super-healthy, and quick and tasty to boot. This cooking technique was developed by the Chinese to save both time and fuel – you cook it very quickly, so it's a 'greener' way to cook. And if the growth in chains such as Wagamama (which stir-fries many of its Japanese-inspired dishes) and the range of stir-fry foods and accessories are anything to go by, cooking and eating this way are becoming ever more popular.

Why it's so good for you

Stir-fries are a great way of bumping up your vegetable quota for the day. You can add all sorts of healthy, nutritious ingredients – you can cook vegetables, meat, soya, fish or seafood, and add whatever seasonings you fancy for a tasty one-pot meal (good news if you hate washing up). As the ingredients are cooked quickly, they retain more

freshness, colour and nutrients than with other methods, which can boil, roast or stew out the goodness and flavour.

The perfect stir-fry

In a Chinese household, a wok is highly prized. It has to be well seasoned so that it gives off what's called 'wok hay', meaning energy or 'qi'. To create positive wok hay, you need to start with a well-oiled wok (just wipe some oil around it with a kitchen towel the first time you use it, then don't scrub all the oil off each time you wash it). A large frying pan will also do the job. Chop your ingredients, then heat the wok until you can feel warmth radiating from its base. To test if it's the right temperature, toss in a few drops of water – if they sizzle and evaporate in a few seconds, the wok's ready for the oil. Groundnut or coconut oils work best as they remain robust at high temperatures – avoid unrefined oils,

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which are easily damaged by high heat as they have lower smoke points, the point at which the oil begins to break down. Pure olive oil is fine, but not extra-virgin. Drizzle oil down the sides of the wok. When it starts to lightly 'dance', it's time to add the food.

Start with dry seasonings such as garlic and ginger, then add onion to ensure it cooks through, then your meat or tofu – aim to sear each of the edges. Next come the vegetables – add those with stronger textures such as carrots or mushrooms first, then greens, broccoli and courgettes, and finally the ones that add crunch, such as peppers, beansprouts or

finely chopped spring onions. You can add in lots of vegetables to hit your five-a-day goal in just one meal. And the wider the variety of colours, the greater the range of nutrients you'll be getting.

If you're cooking fish, small cubes usually only require a few minutes to

Tofu or chicken stir-fry with cashew nuts

SERVES 2

1tbsp groundnut oil
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
Thumb-sized knob fresh ginger, peeled and grated
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 packet smoked tofu or 250g skinless chicken breast, cut into 2cm cubes
80g unsalted cashew nuts
2 pak choi (or any greens), sliced into fine 3cm strips
1 red pepper, deseeded and sliced into fine 3cm strips
2tbsp soy sauce or tamari
Juice of half a fresh lime
1tbsp sherry (optional)
Cooked brown rice or wholewheat noodles
Small bunch fresh coriander, chopped (optional)

- 1 Heat your wok (or large frying pan) until hot.
- 2 Drizzle the oil down the sides of the pan and heat until it starts to lightly dance.
- 3 Add the garlic and ginger and toss around the wok for a minute.
- 4 Add the onion and stir until clear. Then remove with a slotted spoon (some of the garlic and ginger may come too, which is fine).
- 5 Add the tofu or chicken and cook until all the edges are sealed.
- 6 Add the cashew nuts, stirring or tossing the ingredients all the time.
- 7 Once the cashews turn slightly brown, add the pak choi (or greens) and red pepper and stir for a minute.
- 8 Add the onion back in, then the soy sauce or tamari, lime juice and sherry, and mix.
- 9 Serve on a bed of rice or noodles and sprinkle with the coriander if desired.

cook through. And prawns or scallops need only a minute or so. Then finally, add in any 'wet' seasonings, like soy sauce, coconut milk or black bean sauce. But do this slowly by dripping them down the side so you don't lose the heat.

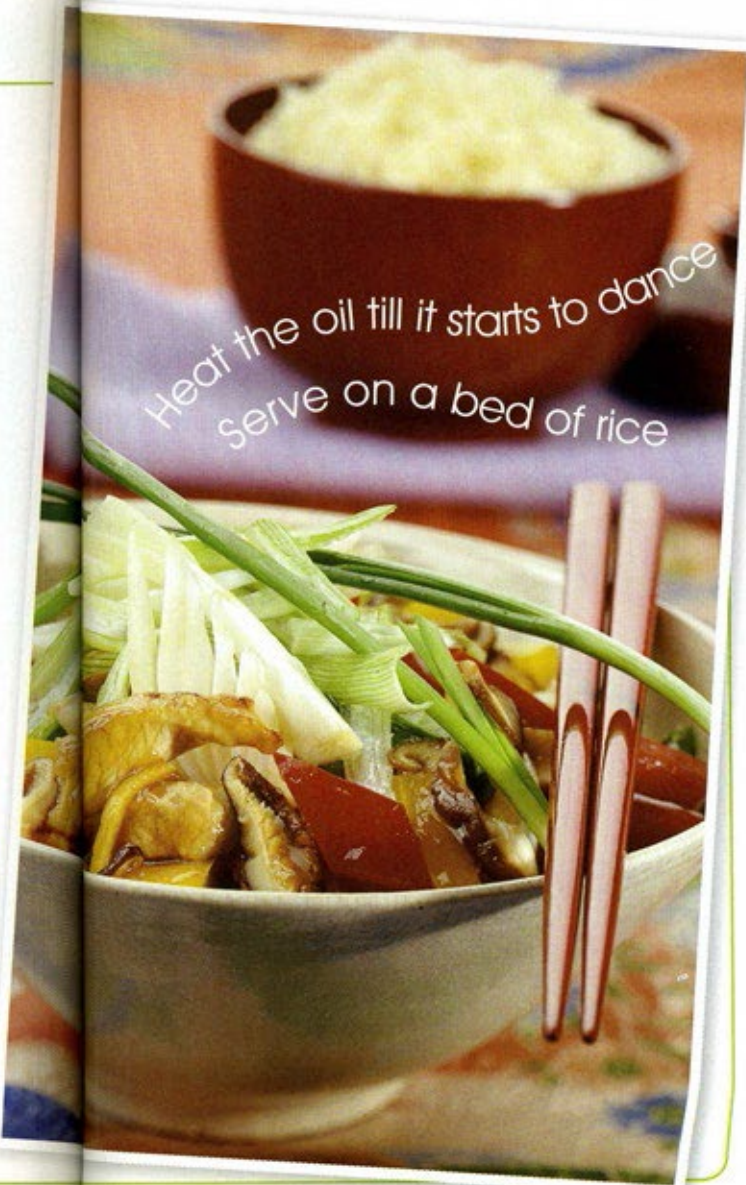
While your food is in the wok, stir it around constantly to ensure it cooks evenly and doesn't burn or stick.

Super-boost your stir-fries

A basic stir-fry with meat and veg makes a nutritious meal. But here are some easy ways to make your stir-fry even healthier:

● **Try seed sprinkles** Just scatter seeds in while cooking to add flavour, crunch and some extra nutrients. Throw them in just before serving to ensure you don't

Heat the oil till it starts to dance
serve on a bed of rice



damage the delicate essential oils they contain. Seeds are high in omega-3 and -6 fatty acids, as well as protein, fibre, and vitamins and minerals, and they're an inexpensive way to make more of your meal.

● **Serve it with brown rice**, which has more fibre and B vitamins than white. And if you're looking to limit wheat intake, you can opt for rice or soba (buckwheat) noodles.

● Add unusual ingredients

Shiitake mushrooms are renowned for their health-giving powers, or try sprinkling in crunchy nuts like cashews or almonds for an extra hit of vitamins, minerals and essential fats. ○

Cashew value:
Make your stir-fries
richer with cashews
or almonds

