

# HEALTHY RETIREMENT

## No need to sacrifice nutrition during Lent

By Ann Piasecki  
Catholic News Service

ROME/VILLE, Ill. — Although regulations specify meatless meals on Fridays during the Lenten season, chef Michael McGreal believes the sacrifice serves a dual role — it meets church obligations and promotes healthy eating habits.

No longer is Friday night defined by fish sticks, macaroni and cheese or tuna casserole. Fresh fish is plentiful, and shipments from Europe, Indonesia or Taiwan offer seafood-eaters an opportunity to indulge in a few special recipes, according to McGreal, chairman of culinary arts at Joliet Junior College. The availability of fish has caused prices to drop as well.

Fish dinner once meant deep-fried or bread-battered recipes, resulting in high-cholesterol, high-calorie, heavy meals. Serving lobster or red snapper once conjured simultaneous visions of drizzled butter and lemon wedges.

Today, heightened awareness about proper nutrition and low-fat diets has caused chefs to redesign their recipe books to include dishes that are both flavorful and low-fat.

It's not hard, said McGreal. Meals comprised of swordfish, Dover sole, catfish and more can be prepared at home as well as in upscale restaurants. He suggests pan-searing most fish dishes in olive oil for approximately 10 minutes per inch, and perhaps a bit longer depending on the thickness of the piece.

Unlike chicken or pork, if the fish isn't cooked quite thoroughly, there is little danger of food poisoning because there is no

fat to attract bacteria. With fish, the trick is not to overcook it; this tends to ruin the texture of the product that is rich in vitamin D. McGreal promotes the use of fish because, unlike chicken, it's already skinless and is free of the fat that typically embodies pork and beef meals.

These low-calorie meals are prime for spice experimentation, he said. The chef warned against drowning the piece in mounds of spices, but said a dash of Thai paste or curry along with a bit of salt and pepper offers a full-flavored dish.

For beginners, McGreal suggests a meal of baked Dover sole topped with lemon basil because the process of filleting is easy. Simply slice the fish along the edge and remove the comblike bone with relative ease. This is a flat fish, so the bone structure is minimal and easily dislodged, he said. Serve with fresh carrots, a glass of white wine and fresh berries served on a flaky light strudel.

For chef George Macht at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, the Lenten season is a good time to serve up healthy, hearty meals, such as vegetable soup. "In my way of thinking, we need to pay attention to the vegetables that are in season. We need to cut back on meat and gather up some good-quality produce," he said.

The problem is that the variety of produce available in February and March is minimal. Even imported stock from other countries lacks freshness and is expensive, he said.

He relies on root vegetables, including carrots, turnips and rutabaga. "You can do a lot with a meatless entree, but soup is good on cold days," according to Macht.



Ann Piasecki/CNS

A student chef in the culinary arts program at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Ill., prepares a nutritious dish. Aside from its penitential significance, Lenten abstinence can promote healthy eating.

Since tomatoes are not in season, the canned variety will suit for a wholesome base that is flavored with fresh root vegetables and some additional canned varieties. The key to success is to use equal amounts of similarly sliced root vegetables to prevent one taste from overpowering the whole pot. Turnips should be blanched before they are added to the soup pot.

The leftovers offer a whole other variety of options, added Macht. Served with pasta, the soup takes on a new shape.

Meanwhile, a serving of pasta together with sauteed carrots or bell peppers, red and green varieties, is both nutritious and substantial. "I like bright colors," he said. "Bright vegetables makes the dish look good. If it's attractive to the eye, it's more fun to eat."

Macht said he believes that Lenten Fridays are great opportunities to involve the kids in the preparation of meals. He suggests attempting a homemade pizza made with fresh ingredients that everyone can apply.

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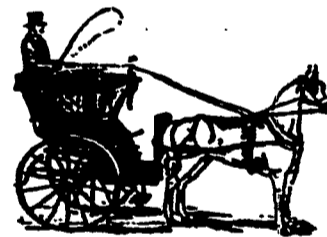
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