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For Better Living
Tips for Nutritious and Delicious Smoothies

Over the last several years, smoothies have become increasingly popular. These thick, cold blender beverages made from a variety of fruits, juices or dairy products and ice are tasty, refreshing and, if made with the right ingredients, nutritious. Easy to concoct with ingredients you likely have on hand, smoothies can be a great choice for a snack or mini-meal. And while the sky is the limit when it comes to creating a smoothie, there are a few things you can do to maximize both nutrition and flavor.

- * For optimum flavor, start with high-quality fresh fruit at the peak of ripeness. Always wash fruit before adding it to your smoothie. Also, cutting fruit into either slices or chunks before putting it into the blender will make it easier to blend.

- * When blending ice into your smoothie, it's best to start with crushed ice or small ice cubes. If you only have large ice cubes, place them into a strong, self-sealing plastic bag and crush down into smaller pieces with a hammer or the bottom of a heavy metal pan before adding to the mixture to be blended.

- * For a thicker smoothie, blend in cubed or pureed frozen fruit. Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, melons, bananas and peaches are all excellent fruits to freeze ahead for use in smoothies. To freeze fruit, first wash it and cut it into cubes, slices or chunks. Sprinkle light colored fruit, like bananas, with lemon juice to help prevent them from darkening. Place the fruit in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze until firm. Once frozen, pop the fruit into self-sealing plastic bags and store in the freezer. You can also puree fresh fruit, freeze it in ice cube trays and then store it in freezer bags.

- * Frozen yogurt, sorbets and ice cream can also be used to thicken smoothies. Although these are delicious additions, they add extra calories as well.

- * To lower the fat and calorie content of your smoothie, use skim or soy milk instead of whole milk; plain, nonfat yogurt in place of regular fruit yogurt; frozen yogurt or sorbet rather than ice cream; and unsweetened fruit instead of sweetened frozen fruit. For example, a basic smoothie made with 1 cup fruit yogurt, 1 cup frozen sweetened strawberries and 1 cup ice cream contains 740 calories compared to 290 in a smoothie made with similar amounts of plain low-fat yogurt, unsweetened frozen fruit and fruit sorbet.

- * Boost the fiber content of smoothies by leaving the skin on fruit and/or by adding ground flaxseed, wheat germ or wheat bran.

- * Increase the calcium content by choosing a milk product as the smoothie's base and/or by mixing in nonfat dry milk powder.

- * For added sweetness, blend a touch of honey or maple syrup into the smoothie. Adding half of a very ripe banana will also make the smoothie sweeter.

- * For a twist, try using flavored ice cubes. Flavored ice cubes can be made by pouring fruit juice, tea or nectar into ice cube trays and freezing.

- * Experiment with different flavorings, such as extracts, cinnamon, nutmeg or cocoa powder. Keep in mind a little goes a long way.

- * Avoid adding raw eggs because they can harbor Salmonella Enteritidis, a disease-causing bacterium. To get the protein eggs provide without the cholesterol or bacteria, try using

pasteurized eggs or a pasteurized egg substitute.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension

Breakfast Smoothie

1 cup orange juice
1 8-oz. container low-fat yogurt, any flavor
1 banana, sliced
½ cup frozen strawberries, sliced
3 to 4 ice cubes

Slice fruit. Combine all ingredients in blender. Mix on high speed until smooth and creamy.
Makes 2 smoothies

Blueberry Fruit Smoothie

1 cup reduced-fat vanilla ice cream
1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
½ cup chopped fresh or frozen peaches, thawed
½ cup pineapple juice
¼ cup reduced-fat vanilla yogurt

In a blender, combine all of the ingredients. Cover and blend until smooth. Serve immediately.
Make 3 servings.