

Healthy Comfort

Cut the fat and calories—not the flavor—from classic down-home foods **BY LESLIE GOLDMAN**

AFTER A LONG RUN in cool weather, you may work up an appetite for the rich flavors and palate-pleasing textures of mac and cheese, meat loaf, or a good old-fashioned casserole. But while they're soothing, easy to prepare, and inexpensive, most comfort foods aren't that good for you. "Recipes handed down from Grandma tend to be higher in saturated fat, lack whole grains, and have more meat than vegetables," says Joan

Salge Blake, R.D., an associate professor in nutritional sciences at Boston University. "They also tend to contain lots of calories, sugar, and sodium," adds Elizabeth Ward, R.D., a Boston-based nutrition consultant. Over the long haul, dishes with that kind of nutrient profile can raise your odds of getting diabetes, heart disease, and obesity—and more immediately, they can cause midrun digestive woes.

That said, with some recipe tinkering, there's room for a little comfort in every runner's diet. Here's how to turn classic but nutritionally bankrupt dishes into healthy—and tasty—fuel.

UPDATED FAVE

Boost the benefits of mac and cheese with broccoli, tomatoes, and red peppers.

COMFORT FOOD MAC AND CHEESE

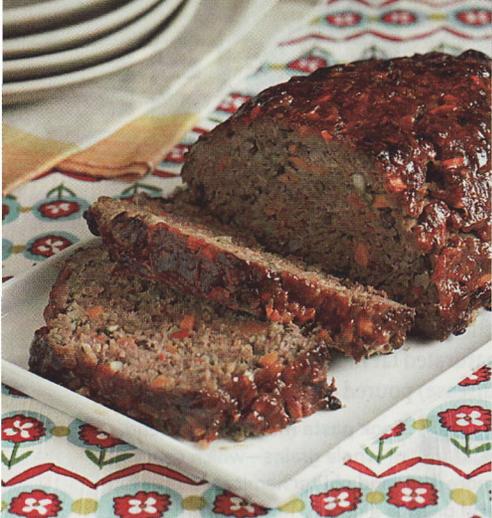
This classic includes saturated fat—rich cheese, whole milk, and butter (too much saturated fat increases your risk for heart disease) poured over white pasta.

MAKE OVER Cook pasta made with a blend of whole grains—which contain more fiber and phytochemicals than white and provide a steady flow of energy—and swap out the full-fat Cheddar for reduced-fat. Don't use fat-free cheese in this dish, says Salge Blake, because it 

When making mashed potatoes, use sweet (you'll get 100% of your daily vitamin A needs). Swap half the butter for extra-virgin olive oil to slash saturated fat.

**EAT
BETTER**





NOT MOM'S MEAT LOAF

Add oatmeal and lentils for more protein and fiber.

doesn't melt well. Substitute fat-free milk and trans fat-free margarine for whole milk and butter; the former have less saturated fat than the latter. Toss in a few cups of veggies, such as broccoli, red peppers, and tomatoes, for a dose of carbs and antioxidants (which protect cells from exercise-induced free-radical damage), including vitamin C. This nutrient assists in collagen production, which helps strengthen bones, tendons, and ligaments.

RESULTS → CUTS 100 CALORIES, 6 G FAT (8 G SAT); ADDS 2.5 G FIBER

**COMFORT FOOD
FRIED CHICKEN**

Chicken pieces are dunked in sodium-rich batter and deep-fried with the skin on—more than doubling the fat content.

MAKE OVER Try baked "fried" chicken: Remove the skin and dip chicken in a fat-free milk and egg white mixture. Dredge it in whole-grain bread crumbs (in a blender, grind up a cereal like bran flakes along with garlic powder and Italian seasonings). Place the pieces on an olive oil-rubbed cookie sheet and bake at 375°F for 55 minutes. You'll cut 700 milligrams of sodium, and by removing the skin you'll slash the fat while retaining all the protein (about 30 grams of the muscle-building nutrient per four-ounce piece). The cereal will get you closer to your 25- to 35-gram daily fiber requirement, and enriched brands like Total supply iron, which is crucial for runners because it enables red blood cells to carry oxygen to muscles.

RESULTS → CUTS 25 CALORIES, 11 G FAT (2 G SAT), 25 MG CHOLESTEROL

**COMFORT FOOD
TUNA-NOODLE CASSEROLE**

The cream of mushroom soup in the original packs 12 fat grams and nearly a day's worth of sodium. Tuna is a good source of fatty acids, but can be high in mercury.

MAKE OVER Heat up a can of reduced-fat, lower-sodium soup (like Campbell's Healthy Request Cream of Mushroom) to keep the silky texture; add mixed frozen veggies (try peas, carrots, corn, and green beans) instead of just peas to increase the variety of antioxidants. Toss in "chunk light" canned tuna or salmon—both are lower in mercury than albacore or "white" tuna and provide omega-3s, which reduce inflammation—and according to a study published in 2007 in *Current Sports Medicine Reports* may boost your metabolic rate, raise bone density, and improve insulin sensitivity. Mix in cooked multi-grain noodles, pour into a casserole dish, top with whole-wheat bread crumbs, and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes or until hot.

RESULTS → CUTS 128 CALORIES, 4 G FAT (2 G SAT), 220 MG SODIUM

**COMFORT FOOD
MEAT LOAF**

The main ingredient is ground beef, which is high in saturated fat and can increase your risk for heart disease.

MAKE OVER Use 90 percent lean ground beef—it's a rich source of protein and iron. You can also use half beef and half extra-lean ground turkey: A 2009 study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* showed those who eat a lot of red meat have an elevated risk of heart-disease and cancer-related death, while white meat slightly decreases risk. Combine the raw meat with egg whites and spices; bump up your fiber by mixing in oatmeal as a binder instead of bread crumbs. Toss in a half-cup of cooked lentils for another source of lean protein. "By making a smaller amount of beef go further," says Salge Blake, "you'll get less saturated fat per bite and you'll save money." Press mixture into a greased loaf pan and bake covered at 400°F for about an hour, or until cooked through.

RESULTS → CALORIES EQUAL; CUTS 8 G FAT (3 G SAT); ADDS 11 G FIBER

Road Tested

Runners fuel up for long runs with the latest energy chews



Clif Shot Bloks
WHAT IT IS Shot Bloks' new packaging makes it easy to squeeze out one blok at a time. Three pieces have 100 calories, 24 g carbs, and 70 mg sodium.
TESTER'S TAKE "I could pop them into my mouth without touching them, so my fingers didn't get sticky." clifbar.com



Carb Boom Energy Chews
WHAT IT IS Made with tapioca syrup, which comes from yucca root. Six pieces contain 90 calories, 23 g carbs, and 55 mg sodium.
TESTER'S TAKE "Small, sweet, and slightly chewy—I thought they tasted like fruit snacks." carbboom.com



Gu Chomps
WHAT IT IS Bite-size octagons pack 100% DV for vitamins C and E, plus amino acids for recovery. Four pieces have 90 calories, 23 g carbs, and 55 mg sodium.
TESTER'S TAKE "These were slightly tart and less candylike than I expected." guenergy.com



Sharkies
WHAT IT IS These shark-shaped chews contain real fruit juice. Half a pack (about six pieces) provides 70 calories, 18 g carbs, 55 mg sodium, and a small amount of fiber.
TESTER'S TAKE "Great tasting, and I especially liked that they're USDA Organic." sharkiesinc.com

FOOD STYLIST (PREVIOUS PAGE AND UPPER LEFT): MATT VONHOF/HAL LEV DECOMBES; BOTTOM RIGHT: MITCHELL HANDEL; COURTESY CHADKIES

→ WHEN MAKING BOXED MAC AND CHEESE, ADD A CUP OF BLACK BEANS AND ONE CUP OF SALSA FOR ADDED FIBER AND ANTIOXIDANTS.