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The 411 on an Easy Fast

by Rachel Burstyn

Every year, before the sun sets on the eve of Yom Kippur, Jews everywhere can be heard repeating the same refrain to families, friends, even strangers at the kosher deli: "Have an easy fast." We say it with confidence and sincerity, as though we actually believe it's possible.

And yet, perhaps it is—that is, if you prepare properly. Caffeine addicts like me, for example, can eliminate withdrawal symptoms, which often include nausea and headaches, by tapering off coffee consumption a week before Yom Kippur. My trick is to start using a combination of caffeinated and decaffeinated beans in my morning cup, and gradually increase the proportion of decaf until it is 100 percent.

What's more, pigging out before a fast is actually counter-productive. (Ever notice how much hungrier you are the morning after a big meal?) A better idea is to eat snacks and light meals every two hours throughout the day before, along with drinking plenty of water. When it comes to your last supper, Aviva Allen, a registered nutritional-consulting practitioner and chef in Toronto, Canada, suggests you ingest a good balance of protein, fat and complex carbohydrates.

"Avoid simple carbs such as white flour, white sugar or fruit juices," she says, "which will cause a spike in your blood sugar, followed by a sudden drop, which you do not want during a fast. Enjoy a meal with plenty of complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, legumes and vegetables, along with a good source of protein, such as chicken, fish or tofu. This will slow down the digestion process, leaving you feeling fuller, longer."

To that end, Allen, who recently published "The Organic Kosher Cookbook: Cooking with a Conscience," has provided us with recipes for the perfect pre-fast menu. The tangy **Lemon-Lentil Soup** makes for a light but hearty start to the meal, while the **Baked Salmon with Mango Salsa** is a not-too-salty, high-protein entrée (vegetarians can use tofu instead of salmon). The **Garlic-Sesame Green Beans** brings to the meal an Asian accent, as well as a healthy heaping of complex carbs.

Keep in mind, however, that when it comes to breaking your fast, tempting as it may be to overeat, Allen strongly advises against it, as doing so can be very stressful on the digestive system. Instead, she suggests, stick with easy-to-digest foods, and avoid meat, chicken, dairy and foods high in refined sugar.

So, as we Jews are wont to say, here's to an easy fast. At least this year when you tell that to your fellow fasters, you can actually mean it!

Rachel Burstyn is a regular contributor to World Jewish Digest.

LEMON-LENTIL SOUP

Ingredients: Serves 8

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 carrots, diced

- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 2 cups red lentils, rinsed
- 6½ cups water
- 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 2-3 cups Swiss chard, washed and thinly sliced
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice (1 lemon)
- Ground black pepper and/or cayenne to taste

Instructions:

In a large pot, sauté onions in the olive oil at a medium-high temperature. When onions are translucent, add celery and carrot, and sauté for a few more minutes. Add water, lentils and 1 teaspoon salt, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and continue cooking, covered, for 30-40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the Swiss chard and parsley, and continue cooking for another 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add lemon juice. Add salt, pepper and/or cayenne to taste.

BAKED SALMON WITH MANGO SALSA

Ingredients: Serves 6

Salmon

- 6 fillets salmon
- Sea salt
- Pepper
- Garlic powder
- Sesame seeds

Mango Salsa

- 1½ cups finely diced mango (2 mangos)
- ¾ cup finely diced red pepper
- 3 tablespoons minced red onion
- 3 tablespoons minced parsley
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Instructions:

To make the mango salsa, combine all ingredients in a small bowl, and refrigerate for about 20 minutes.

For the baked salmon, preheat oven to 400 F. Place fillets on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Season each fillet with a pinch of salt, pepper and a large pinch of garlic powder. Cover with sesame seeds. Bake for 10-12 minutes. Serve with mango salsa.

GARLIC-SESAME GREEN BEANS

Ingredients: Serves 8

- 1 pound green beans, rinsed
- 2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds
- 4 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons mirin (sweet rice wine)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt

Instructions:

Remove bottom tips of green beans. Place green beans in a large steamer. Sprinkle green beans with a bit of sea salt and steam for about 3-4 minutes (until beans are lightly cooked but still crisp). Shock green beans in cold water, then remove and drain.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the remaining ingredients with the green beans and toss. Refrigerate for at least an hour before serving.

Recipes courtesy of "The Organic Kosher Cookbook" by Aviva Allen. Order online at www.organickoshercookbook.com.