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CULINARY THRILL SEEKING: COOK THIS, GET HIPPIE CHIPS

PORT ARTHUR — Cook this, have fun, get full

Eating great food is a priority for me. If I can make it more healthy and save money doing it, that's icing on the cake, so to speak. It's an exciting mission to me, but those who thought it would be boring need only pick up "Cook This, Not That!"

Authors David Zinczenko and Matt Goulding have sassy commentary and eye-popping photos comparing dollars and calories saved recreating versions of popular restaurant foods. Try one restaurant's baby back ribs for 3,021 calories, or make Dr. Pepper Ribs for 400 calories on your plate. Cornmeal catfish, teriyaki scallops, butternut ravioli, loaded pizza and turkey meat loaf mimic what you could get out. This is a good guy cookbook, it's easy to read and it could just be the motivation you need to be good to your gut.

Here's some quickie goodies from just two pages of this useful book:

- Mix a can of tuna with chopped pickles, minced onion, and equal parts Dijon and olive oil mayo. Stuff into a whole wheat pita.
- Mix together a bit of mayo with grated horseradish. Spread on toasted rye or wheat bread, then top with roast beef, sharp Cheddar, sliced cucumbers, pickled onions and arugula.
- Slice an avocado and remove the pit. Fill the round cavities with canned tuna and a squeeze of lemon, plus salt and pepper. Eat with Triscuits.
- Mix equal parts of cooked brown rice and drained canned black beans. Top with leftover chicken or steak (or deli turkey), salsa and guacamole. Eat with a small stack of tortilla chips.

Do you know Hungry Girl?

This real lady has a cool avatar kind of character that appears on healthy stuff. If you're not familiar, get to know her, because Hungry Girl can point you in good directions, like toward Mann Packing Co. clean and cut-up packaged products. She's on packages of cut up sweet potato, courage musquee (butternut squash) and other natural goodies you see right in front of you in the produce section, but may not be trying.

Snacks on the Go come in a party pack with the best celery I've ever tasted. That sounds funny, but it's true.

Sweet potato slices tumbled out of a bag ready to be baked in olive oil. I actually blackened some (on purpose). Sprinkled with cinnamon, baked sweet potato spears also made a fabulous breakfast, paired with my famous special sauce of ketchup and Taco Bell packets, seasoned with chipotle dust.

Nothing could be easier than mixing olive oil, red wine vinegar and dijon mustard into their slaw mix, unless it would be putting the mix directly on a sandwich. Try something new.

“Quick & Easy Tips to Lose Weight”

Drink water, make juice, ditch stress and eat real food, Georgia Salgado Chavez asks readers in this slim little book. You may have heard it all before, but have you listened? The author keeps things short and simple, like this:

Simple recipes:

Smoothie: Orange, pineapple, coconut

Milkshake: 1 cup of milk, 1 banana, 1 spoon of honey

Juice: Carrots, parsley, cucumber, celery, beets and grapes

Fruit water: 1 cup of water, 1 spoon of raw sugar (honey) 1 slice of melon

Tea: Sage

Meals: Fish, steam it with some spices; lemon adds great taste to fish.

Seafood combo: add chopped tomato, cilantro, serrano pepper, onion (don't add salt). Add lemon juice, mix it, and eat it with crackers.

Hippie Chips

You've gotta just love saying “Hippie Chips.” The baked potato chips come in fun flavors like White Room Cheddar, Woodstock Ranch and Memphis Blues BBQ. I'm hooked on the goods and groovy labels from Rock-n-Roll Gourmet, launched by a rocker couple. I think you'll love eating and saying Hippie Chips, too.

“Don't Worry, Be Hippie!” and “Peace, Love and Gluten Free” is how the all-natural snack is billed.

Rock & Pop Jalapeno Korn and Kettle Korn bags feature a suited keyboardist in a fedora and a rocker girl guitarist in black. This line puts me in an '80s feel.

ddoiron@panews.com