

Healthier Comfort Foods

Winter comfort foods often get a bad rap. People say they come out of winter hibernation a few kilos heavier because of all the comfort food they have been eating. It is true, we often crave carbohydrate rich, higher fat and sugar, warm hearty meals during winter, but they certainly don't have to add calories to your diet. Not all comfort food is created equally and choosing the healthier options will help you come out of the other end of winter, no heavier than when you went in.

Traditional comfort foods might include big bowls of pasta, stews, soups, curries, pies, puddings, hot chocolates, the list can go on. But all of these things can be made with fewer calories, less sugar and less saturated fats, with just a few easy tweaks.

First tip is to bulk EVERYTHING out with vegetables. I am not talking just your classic winter veg – pumpkin, sweet potato, potato, carrot. Try adding zucchini, beans, broccoli, spinach, peas... the options are endless. Let's take a curry for example. Don't go your classic Massaman with a total of meat and potato as your ingredients. Try a lighter curry base and pack it with veggies. Or you can even look at having a smaller sized serving and have steamed veg on the side. Hold off on the Naan breads and have some pappadums instead. And always opt for your brown rices over your white rices.

Which brings us to our next point. Whether you are cooking up a slow cooker ragu to serve with some delicious pasta or adding noodles to your soups, always opt for the wholegrain variety, not the white variety. Wholemeal pasta, brown rice, but also try things like quinoa or barley, they are delicious in soups or stews.

Choose spices to enhance flavour. Adding spices to curries, stews, pasta sauces, gives them a flavour punch with minimal calories. So rather than relying on sauces or bases from a jar, try making something from scratch with lots of herbs and spices instead.

It is also good to avoid the heavy cream based dishes. I know everyone loves a homemade mac n cheese or carbonara but try using lighter tomato based sauces for pasta. Or you can be really clever and make some delicious creamy sauces using cauliflower, it is a thing and it can be delicious. Use coconut milk instead of coconut cream. Greek yogurt instead of cream in soups or instead of ice cream with desserts.

Let's not forget all the yummy winter desserts. Sticky date pudding, apple pie... There are always lighter recipes that still taste super tasty, so try these instead. Try fruit based desserts like poached pears or apple crumble. Making a crumble rather than a pie cuts out the pastry element but still gives you the warming fruit you crave.

But in saying all of this, every now and then it is okay to have your choc-lava cake and eat it too. Or your creamy Carbonara with bacon pieces, or your Massaman curry. Just remember that portion sizes are important here. Enjoy but don't overindulge. Choosing a smaller portion will help those calories in check and make coming out of hibernation that little bit easier.