



# Ask Ellie

Dietitian and *Healthy Appetite* host **Ellie Krieger** answers your nutrition questions and shares a make-ahead meal for the holidays.

**Q: How can I cut back on refined sugar when I bake?**

Laura Mullin, Marina del Rey, CA

**A:** Try using natural, unrefined sweeteners like honey, maple syrup and agave nectar. They raise your blood sugar more slowly than white sugar and help keep baked goods moist. Honey and syrup have distinct tastes, while agave is more neutral, so choose the one that best fits your recipe (and for all recipes, reduce the baking temperature by 25°). Use these conversions as a general rule:

**Honey:** Use  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup honey for 1 cup sugar. Reduce the recipe's liquid by 3 tablespoons or add an extra  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dry ingredients. Add a pinch of baking soda.

**Maple syrup:** Use  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup maple syrup for 1 cup sugar. Reduce the recipe's liquid by 3 tablespoons or add an extra  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dry ingredients.

**Agave nectar:** Use  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup agave nectar for 1 cup sugar. Reduce the recipe's liquid by  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup or add an extra  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup dry ingredients.

**Q: How long can I keep chicken in the freezer?**

Marguerite Zeman, Williamsburg, VA

**A:** If you're pressed for time, the freezer can be your best friend. You can freeze uncooked poultry for up to a year, and ground or cooked poultry for four months. Just be sure to press any excess air out of the freezer bag.



## MINESTRONE SOUP

ACTIVE: 20 min | TOTAL: 45 min | SERVES: 6

- |               |  |               |  |
|---------------|--|---------------|--|
| 2             | tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil   | 1             | 28-ounce can no-salt-added diced tomatoes                |
| 1             | large onion, diced   | 1             | 14-ounce can crushed tomatoes                            |
| 4             | cloves garlic, minced  | 6             | cups low-sodium chicken broth                            |
| 2             | stalks celery, diced   | 1             | 15-ounce can low-sodium kidney beans, drained and rinsed |
| 1             | large carrot, diced  | 1             | cup elbow pasta  |
| $\frac{1}{3}$ | pound green beans, trimmed and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups) | $\frac{1}{2}$ | cup finely grated parmesan cheese                        |
| 1             | teaspoon dried oregano   | $\frac{1}{3}$ | cup parmesan cheese                                      |
| 1             | teaspoon dried basil   | 2             | tablespoons chopped fresh basil                          |
|               | Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  |               |  |

**1.** Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 30 seconds. Add the celery and carrot and cook until they begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the green beans, dried oregano and basil,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and pepper to taste; cook 3 more minutes.

**2.** Add the diced and crushed tomatoes and the chicken broth to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer 10 minutes. Stir in the kidney beans and pasta and cook until the pasta and vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes. Season with salt. Ladle into bowls and top with the parmesan and chopped basil.

**Per serving (2 cups):** Calories 260; Fat 8 g (Saturated 2 g); Cholesterol 5 mg; Sodium 560 mg; Carbohydrate 37 g; Fiber 10 g; Protein 15 g

## What's a great make-ahead dinner?

**Do you have a healthy meal that can be made in advance and reheated?**

Jean Donovan, Fairfax, VA

**A:** Minestrone is the perfect make-ahead dinner. This satisfying meal-in-a-bowl lasts up to five days in the refrigerator or four months in the freezer. I like to whip up a batch on the weekend and freeze individual portions so my family can have a home-cooked meal even if the head chef (me!) isn't there. During the holidays I always have some on hand—it's great for filling in the veggie gap.