

THE ESSENTIALS

There are certain items and I have in my fridge or pantry ALL the time. This is a list will make your life SO MUCH EASIER!

DRY SEASONINGS

(This is the single best way to add almost NO calories but great flavor)

- Cavender's Greek Seasoning** This can be hard to find but SO worth it. When I pop microwave popcorn I doctor it up by spraying the dry plain popcorn with Butter flavored cooking spray first, then I toss it. I then sprinkle Cavenders' on the popcorn and it instantly becomes a delicacy! I use this in the artichoke dip too, so find it wherever you can. I order mine online.
- Chef Paul's Seasoning** Paul Prudhomme makes a seasoning for every kind of meat or fish and they are all good. I like the Blackened Red Fish Magic best!
- Cinnamon - Ground** A good one for bread pudding, but also mulled wine and a sprinkle or two on whole wheat toast can change the course of your whole day. (See Cinnamon Toast Recipe) I add this to my high fiber cereal and it's suddenly transformed into a real treat!
- Cloves – Whole or Ground** A little of this spice goes a long way, but mulled wine is simply not the same without it. I don't use it in very many dishes but the mulled wine would suffer without it, so when you see the holidays coming make sure you have this stock. If you get whole cloves and you don't have a spice net/holder – all you need to do is take a tea bag and empty the tea out. Place the whole cloves inside the bag. Taking some thread tie the open end securely so the cloves don't escape! The cloves can work their magic, and you don't have to worry about having to find them later.
- Garlic Powder** I have recently discovered that this is a great substitute for Garlic Salt when I think I've had my limit of salt.
- Garlic Salt** Any kind will do. I use a lot of the stuff – that's why I started using the powdered version of this spice more.
- Lawry's Season Salt** There are other brands, but none compares to Lawry's.

Nutmeg - Ground	Great for bread pudding, and even wonderful in warm milk. This seasoning is sometimes forgotten but not after you remember to buy it and use it once.
Pepper	Ground black – but fresh ground is better!
Salt	I like any salt – lately I've been using Sea and Kosher Salt. If you have a salt issue then you probably already have good substitutes, but sometimes we get in a rut when it comes to something we use all the time – so if it's been a while since you changed salt substitutes – go to a grocery store that you don't usually frequent and see if they have something interesting you've never seen. You might be surprised what you'll find.
Tony Chachere's	This is a Cajun seasoning and if you've never used it then it is wonderful on seafood, but I use it in salads as well. Give it a try. It can definitely put a new twist (taste) on an old recipe. As we say down South – make's it spicy good!

CONDIMENTS, SALAD DRESSINGS AND SUCH

Balsamic Vinegar	This is what I use on my salad when I'm having a plain salad. This and some garlic salt and Tony Chachere's and my salad it set.
Brown Mustard	When you make a great sandwich this just has to be a part of it. I LOVE a low fat sausage grilled and then smothered in onions and brown mustard. YUM! Also, see my Bodacious BLT and Sweet As Honey Mustard Dressing recipes.
Horseradish sauce	See above. For purists (meaning my family back home in Mississippi) just some of this with sugar free ketchup is your sauce for shrimp cocktail.
Ketchup (sugar free)	I don't use this a lot but find that I'm glad I do have it around especially when we have boiled shrimp. A touch of horseradish and you got your cocktail sauce, which is my favorite not just for shrimp but I also use this on my Faux Fried Chicken and Kitty's Katish. And lots of folks just like to eat ketchup. If the first brand you buy doesn't suit you, then by all means try another. No sense eating all that sugar in regular ketchup, when a good one without sugar is out there with your name on it!

Lemon Juice	Good to have fresh, but you never know when you'll need a splash of lemon so have this handy.
Lime Juice	Same as Lemon Juice.
Mayonnaise (Fat Free)	I use this as the base for so many recipes. The Artichoke Dip recipe simply could not be possible without this low calorie version of Mayonnaise, which is typically 100 calories per tablespoon. This low cal version is 10 calories. I rest my case. I will not lie and tell you it takes like real mayo on a sandwich, but with a touch of brown mustard added to it, it's pretty darn good. I cook with this and now prefer it. And one reason is that I can eat giant mouthfuls of this and go to sleep at night with a clear conscience.
Teriyaki sauce	If you've never tried Teriyaki sauce on your grilled shrimp you are about to be sent over the rainbow! When I grill kabobs I ALWAYS use this as the last flavor I coat my kabob with. My husband Neil loves to take grilled shrimp or chicken and dip either or both of those in a bowl of Teriyaki sauce that he keeps by his plate. You'll find many uses for this one!
Wishbone Salad Spritzers	They make several flavors but my favorite is the Caesar Salad flavor. I use it on steamed vegetables as well as salad. And it's great on a baked sweet potato, which will have a salty-sweet flavor.
Worcestershire sauce	You already know of this I'm sure but did you know that it makes a great dip! Fat Free mayonnaise mixed with this and a tiny dollop of sugar free ketchup and you've got a great dipping sauce for shrimp or even chips! Add a touch of horseradish and you've got a terrific steak or shrimp sauce.

FOR BAKING

Cocoa	Believe it or not you can make your own chocolate syrup. Blend together one tablespoon of this into ½ cup Splenda for baking. Bring water to a boil in a Pyrex cup and take exactly 1 tablespoon of the boiling water and immediately mix it into the cocoa/Splenda mixture. Add 1 tsp Vanilla Extract and stir. You will have instant chocolate syrup for only about 20-25 calories. Depending on how much you need you will increase the size of the measurements, but one full tablespoon of this rich chocolate syrup will sweeten up any hot milk and turn it into heaven! Great when it's still hot on frozen fruit sorbets too!
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Splenda for Baking If you like food sweet then this is your new best friend. The packets of Equal or Splenda or Sweet & Low are good for coffee but NOT for baking. Splenda for baking is a wonderful thing!

Vanilla Extract Most kitchens have this anyway, but if you never thought of it, try adding ½ tsp to fat free milk that you warm up at night..

MISCELLANEOUS CAN'T DO WITHOUTS

Chicken Bullion I like Maggi powdered brand, but there are many that are good. My personal preference is to NOT buy cubes but to get the powdered version of the stuff. I use this to fake sauté vegetables in (along with water of course), instead of butter. A cup of hot chicken bullion prepared like a cup of soup makes for a great almost no calorie filler-upper to get you over a hump if you're out of calories for the day, too.

Cooking spray And I LOVE Butter flavor best! But you'll also keep Olive Oil flavor on hand too!

Garlic – chopped Fresh is best but this sure is handy when you need garlic – like right now!

Jams and Jellies - Sugar Free Smuckers is my favorite but there are others. I use this to make syrup (20 seconds in a microwave and you've got any flavor syrup you want) The strawberry flavor is wonderful on my No Bake Cheese Cake. I use the Orange Marmalade on my Orange Glazed Yams and Pears and Apricot on my Apricot and Lemon Chicken. And what about a good old-fashioned jelly sandwich on whole wheat bread. YUMMY! At 10 calories a tablespoon, you cannot go wrong here!

Laughing Cow Cheese The wedges. Creamy and wonderful and also pre-measured – these are WONDERFUL on toasted whole-wheat tortillas! They make a great substitute for high fat cheese when serving cheese and crackers. And I LOVE to slice a firm pear or apple and slather this on it like a cracker.

Margarine Low fat and non-hydrogenated only, which is hard to find so this will make you a label reader if nothing else does.

Pickles No explanation needed here. Pickles have almost no calories and can change two pieces of bread with meat or cheese in to something deserving of the word – Sandwich.

- Salsa Keep buckets of this around. There's no such thing as too much salsa, but make sure you get the fresh kind – meaning the kind that's in the refrigerated section of your grocery.
- Slim Fast POWDERED CHOCOLATE KIND ONLY. I make a very thick milkshake out of this. It's great on a hot summer day when you want something cold like ice cream. You take 1 cup of fat free milk and one scoop of powdered chocolate slim fast and pour it into a blender. Take one-tablespoon cocoa and add to the mixture. Add cubed ice and blend this until it is very thick, adding more and more ice until the blender will no longer blend. It will take a couple of times doing this for you to figure out how much ice to add. I like mine VERY thick. YUM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- Sugar Free Syrup Smuckers is my preference and I've used several. I use this to sweeten anything that calls for brown sugar; bread pudding or mulled wine and it's really good as regular syrup too.

FOOD

(Now this is where the rubber meets the road)

This list does not include the items you'll need when you plan a dinner or lunch and purchase food for specific meals. These are my staples. If you come home from work and want to whip something up quickly, then this list will keep you out of the fast food drive in window!

- Artichokes - Canned in Water These are great to have around (for dip) but also just as an "I need to put something in my mouth NOW" kind of thing. Very low in calories and a few squirts of salad spritzer and they're delish! I use them regularly in many of my salads to make them more hearty.
- Artichokes - Fresh If you get them on sale they can be a good buy and very low in fat and calories. Who says you have to have butter sauce to dip the leaves in? Just try my recipe for cooked Artichokes!
- Asparagus For my Asparagus Super Soup I use canned and sometimes I just open a can and eat the whole thing because that "food itch" needs scratching. Fresh Asparagus is wonderful if you bake it on a cookie sheet that's been sprayed with butter flavored cooking spray (spray the Asparagus too) and then dust with garlic salt.
- Bagels - Whole Wheat They make great substitutes for bread for sandwiches. I use the Alternative Bagel by Western bagel OR Sara Lee

whole-wheat mini bagels. Both of these have around 100 calories.

- Bananas
This is a perfect fruit. You don't even have to wash it since it comes in its own wrapper.
- Beans – Fat Free Refried
You already know all of the regular ways to eat this – but have you ever stuffed celery with it? I grew up on pimento cheese stuffed in celery. Try this low fat and cal substitute.
- Bell Peppers
These stay fresh a remarkably long time, so I like to have them on hand for salads and if I have any of my Artichoke and Crabmeat Dip left (I make that dip almost every weekend), I will stuff half of a pepper with dip, store it in a baggie and freeze it for dinner some other time.
- Bread – Whole Wheat
I'm a bread eater – so shoot me! Get it low enough in calories and there's no guilt in French Toast or my Bodacious BLT (see both recipes)!
- Broccoli
Fresh or frozen I eat this every week. When I'm starving (and that happens a lot) I take a microwavable bowl (a large one) I put a tablespoon of Maggi Chicken bullion in it and then pour in water. I add broccoli but make sure I have enough water that the broccoli is still immersed. This makes a great EXTREMELY light soup that will fill you up till you pop. Sometimes I toss in green beans and fat free chopped turkey. This has gotten me over MANY diet humps.
- Bran Cereal – 100%
My 'regularity' got 'irregular' as I dieted and so I highly recommend eating bran and fiber whenever you can. As your digestive system goes, so will you. If it stops, so will you.
- Cream Cheese – Fat Free
I cook with this and I eat it on my bagels. It's a wonderful treat to toast a bagel and then slather on the cream cheese like there's no tomorrow. The FF version of cream cheese only has 30 calories in TWO tablespoons. That's a giant gob of cream cheese!
- Eggs – Faux & Real
I have not found a single recipe that calls for eggs that I couldn't use this as a substitute. (Maybe sunny-side up eggs won't work. HA!). Lower in calories and cholesterol, I am able to enjoy French Toast every weekend now using this product. If you're an egg purist – then try real egg whites.
- English Muffins – Whole Wheat
These are great as mini pizzas, toasted with sugar free jam or make a low calorie Egg McMuffin!

- Lettuce – Romaine or? Just keep it around – always. You’ll be surprised by the end of the week what you have as leftovers and how good they can be thrown over lettuce and made into a salad.
- Milk – Fat Free If you drink whole milk and can’t live without it – okay. But just try this alternative. I prefer it now to whole or even 2%. And if you haven’t made one of my milk shakes – then now might be the time.
- Onions You simply must have onions. They are good in sandwiches and great fake sautéed and I use them in my scrambled faux eggs. Toss some chopped onion into a salad and your taste buds will seek out those tasty tid bits!
- Parmesan Cheese – Reduced Fat In order to make my artichoke dip (see recipe - which I make almost every weekend) I NEED this product. I use it on my spaghetti and on salads but I got fat because I LOVE dip. This product simply put, makes my version of Artichoke Dip heaven!
- Pears Pears are an essential to me. I eat them raw and I roast them on the grill on a regular basis. This is my NEW favorite fruit and I can’t seem to get enough of it. Roasted and salted they seem to take on the feel of a comfort food.
- Pita Pockets – Whole Wheat I just recently discovered these. I get the 80 calorie per pocket kind and lately I’ve been taking a scoop of my artichoke dip along with tons of steamed broccoli and making a terrific lunch with this. I make my husband low fat turkey and cheese pitas for his lunch, stuffing in lots of dill pickles and brown mustard. This is turning in to my new favorite bread. Actually ALL bread is my new favorite bread. And how can they all be new when you eat them all the time, you might ask. Because I love bread so much that when I eat it, I feel reborn! Reborn is pretty darn new.
- Popcorn (100 cal pacs) This should probably be in the snacks section (as a matter of fact I’m going to put it there too) because popcorn is a food group to me. I eat this almost everyday. Go to Cavender’s Greek Seasoning in the “Seasonings” and see how I fix it. It’s also in my recipes under Popcorn With Personality. WOW! This is simply delish!
- Tomatoes – Chopped Canned I make low cal spaghetti 2-3 times a month, so I keep this on hand for last minute dinners that are good and hot that feel and taste like I went to a lot of trouble.

- Tortillas – Carb Smart I love to cut these up into 8 wedges and toast them. I use them instead of chips for dipping and with Laughing Cow Cheese – garlic and herb flavor.
- Tortillas – Whole Wheat I keep stacks of these in the fridge. There’s nothing easier than toasting a couple of these when you’re hungry and you’ve got an instant healthy low fat treat! I make tacos with them and cut them into triangles, spray with non-stick cooking spray, toast them and you’ve got chips, and I’ve even taken fat free cream cheese and sugar free jelly, loaded up the tortilla and rolled it up and made myself a warm wonderful sweet breakfast burrito – very similar to a crepe.
- Turkey – Ground, Extra Lean *I usually buy 2-3 of these at a time and freeze them.* Jennie’o makes a ground Lean Italian Seasoned Ground Turkey that will not just knock your socks off - you’ll have trouble putting on your shoes! This makes great burritos, tacos and is a GREAT meat for my Spaghetti and Lasagna Ligera.
- Zucchini Another fresh vegetable that works in salads but also grills well on skewers. If you grill it, don’t forget your Teriyaki sauce!
- Whipped Cream - Fat Free Low cal hot chocolate is made so much better with a scoop of Cool Whip or Redi Whip. It’s a minor thing, but you need to learn that you are special and this is just one way to make a dish more special and the fat free version is very doable - in moderation. (This is not really a “food” but I didn’t know where else to put it.)

SNACKS

Yes, we need our snacks!

Coffee

- Cocoa – Sugar Free Hot You can make real hot Cocoa with Skim milk but the instant kind from packets has less calories. At 50 calories per cup that’s hard to beat. I do confess that when I want a super duper treat I use skim milk and my Sugar Free Chocolate Syrup and make the real deal.

Cookies – Low Fat/Sugar Free

I don't keep these at my house – I'll eat the whole bag, BUT many people are able to exercise restraint. So who am I to tell them NO on this?

Crackers – Whole Grain Reduced Fat; Wheat Thin, Triscuits and All Bran Garlic and Herb are all good choices.

Diet Drinks and Flavored Water

Diet Hansen's Soda – Creamy Root Beer, Dad's Diet Root Beer, Diet Dr Pepper, Fresca and Diet Ginger Ale are just a few of my favorite sodas. The flavored waters are good but check the calories. Some of them have calories.

Gum – Sugar Free

Keep this in your pocket or purse and it will take you over the hump of needing to chew something. Just remember not to smack!

Ice Cream – Low Fat or Sugar Free

Same as the cookies, I can't have this around. But if you feel you can then be sure and measure what you eat. Even fat free and sugar free versions of ice cream still have calories.

Okra – Pickled

By now you know that I'm from the deep south and I grew up on okra prepared any way you can think of. If you've never tried pickled okra – well, it's like if a crunchy pickle married and marinated artichoke heart and they had a baby. This may not get you to try pickled okra but I'll bet the next time you see a jar in the store you'll remember this.

Peppermints (or other hard candy)

Sugar Free only. But be careful when you eat these. I bought a bag and as I am prone to do I ate the whole bag – which upset my stomach terribly. I hadn't eaten a lot of calories, but I still paid for it with an upset stomach.

Popcorn (100 cal pacs)

Never be without these – they'll save your butt! I prefer the Kettle Corn, but if you like plain and you are on a budget try taking 3 tablespoons un-popped popcorn and put it in a brown paper lunch bag. Secure the end by folding it over a few times and then notching it to lock it in place. Then pop in your microwave just like the prepackaged kind. This has 100 calories and costs just pennies.

Popsicles – Sugar Free

There are Popsicles out there that have 15 calories each

Potato Chips – Baked or Fat Free

Same as the cookies and ice cream, I'll eat the whole bag, but I hear people say all the time they can eat one serving. If you can I applaud you!

Pretzels I like the “48 pretzels equals 100 calories” kind because it tricks me into thinking I’m eating more. And the large sticks which are 40 calories each are what I have used before for my Bacon Wands recipe.

Tea I never drank “sweet tea” growing up, which is a southern staple. My Dad was a Dentist and we just didn’t drink sweet drinks – but I do like tea – hot or iced tea.

HANDY NON-FOOD UTENCILS

Aluminum foil

Baggies Gallon, Quart or Snack size – you’ll use these a lot.

Cookie/baking Sheet

Cookie cooling rack (metal) I use this for Kitty’s Katfish, Faux Fried Scallops, Faux Fried Shrimp and many other recipes that need to be elevated in order to cook properly. When I cook my Faux Fried Chicken I prefer skewers, but if you don’t have any and you’re dying for fried chicken – this WILL work!

Cutting Board I have several of these because I don’t ever cut veggies on the same board I cut meat or poultry and some meals call for both.

Grill (Outdoor kind)

Knife (a great one)

Measuring Cups I have 2 sets so I always have a clean set ready to cook with.

Measuring Spoons Same as Measuring Cups.

Microwave Get to know your various Power Levels. There’s nothing worse than cooking something in the Microwave and having it hot in one spot and still frozen in another. Lower your power levels when you set the power and cook the dish longer. This will make for more even heating throughout.

Mirror – Full Length We’re being honest here. You need to see yourself, bumps, lumps and all. For those who are fat and proud – I’m happy for you – honestly. I said that a few times and may have believed it for a moment or two, but deep down I wanted out of the prison I had eaten my way in to. I will never look like Bo Derrick did in the movie ‘Ten’. I’m just a smaller

version of my same old body, but I LOOK at it now – instead of around it. See yourself. You are beautiful. You always were.....

Paper Plates

Portion Perfect Dinnerware A K LW product coming soon.

Portion Perfect Glassware A K LW product coming soon.

Scale to weigh food Measuring cups work great for most food items but if you really want to know what 4 ounces of chicken looks like you have to weigh it. I have a scale that measures by the ounce and easily switches to grams – so I can't trick myself into not knowing how much I'm eating.

Scale to weigh yourself The scale is a personal thing. To weigh or not to weigh, that is the question. I weigh when I think I can handle what the result will be. And I won't preach about when you should weigh or even if you should weigh. I do it because I need to know for my own well-being. But if you think weighing will trip you up – then do this at your own pace. This is YOUR life. The info I'm giving you helped me, but only I can guarantee that it will help me – I can't give you that same guarantee. Only you can give you that. You can do this. I know you can. I gave up on myself a million times. Thank God I tried one million - and one...

Skewers

No longer will you use these just for Kabobs. I use these for my Faux Fried Chicken and a makeshift grill for Kitty's Katfish.