- Cooking

HEALTH

We can help you live your best life



Is your AIR FRYER as healthy AS YOU THINK?

Yes, it's quick and convenient, but does it deliver on nutritional value?

Back in the 60s, it was the humble Teasmade. The following decade saw a fuss over the fondue. Then came the microwave, Nutribullet and spiralizer, among others. Today, the air fryer is the kitchen gadget of the moment. Around 58%* of UK households have one – including Nigella Lawson's. And it's no wonder they've become a hit during this cost-of-living crisis, with Brits keen to save up to 80% on energy costs. This 'wonder' appliance has been lauded for its health benefits too, as it works by circulating hot air to achieve a fried finish without all the oil. Less oil equals fewer calories. But how healthy is it when it comes to nutrition or harmful chemicals? Before you rush to buy, here are some things to consider. >>**

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1 It's common to burn food

Yes, air fryers cook food fast, but this means new users may find themselves accidentally overdoing it more often – and charred food is a possible cancer-causing carcinogen. It can be tricky to check how cooking is progressing, due to most models not having a clear lid to look through. Experiment with times and read labels for the correct temperature to ensure that your dishes are cooked to perfection.

SHOP RIGHT

In the process of investing in an air fryer? 'Opt for a model with more than one drawer,' says Jenna Hope. 'This allows you to have more than one component of a meal cooking at any given time (or even prepping tomorrow's breakfast, lunch or dinner), further saving you time and making healthy eating even more feasible.'

2 They can draw out healthy fats

While food cooked in an air fryer may lose fewer nutrients when compared to deep-frying, if you're trying to include more healthy omega-3s in your diet to improve your cholesterol level, you need to take care. 'Air fryers can actually reduce the amount of healthy fats in food, such as fresh fish,' says chef Jenna Moran, founder of whimsyandspice.com. Instead, 'lightly steaming appears to be the best way to preserve the nutrients in most foods,' adds nutritional therapist Jenny McGuckian.

DID YOU KNOW?

If you mainly oven-bake your food, there's less of a difference when it comes to health benefits of using an air fryer instead.

3 Oil can still be an issue

If you do need to use oil in an air fryer recipe, choose one with a high smoke point, such as avocado oil or coconut oil, to minimise the formation of harmful compounds when cooking. While air fryers are no more likely to produce these chemicals than cooking food in an oven, damaged non-stick coating in an air fryer can cause toxins to be released into the air and food. Avoid using rough tools when you're cleaning your air fryer, so you don't damage the coating – a toothbrush can usually do the trick.

4 Don't overfill

Feeding the brood? If you want to cook an entire family meal in the air-fryer basket, always check that there is enough room for air to circulate around the food. Overcrowding your air fryer can risk food not being cooked properly – compromising both taste and food safety. Try not to squish or stack foods. If in doubt, cook in batches and look to upgrade to a larger air fryer.

5 It's easy to eat more processed foods

A bowl of chips might be healthier in the air fryer, but it's still a bowl of chips. Try to resist simply cooking processed freezer foods – even though they are convenient. Just because something is air-fried, it doesn't mean that it's automatically healthy, says nutritionist Lee Mitchell. 'It's vital you maintain a balanced diet of nutritious wholefoods.'

PHOTOS: GETTY. *THE GOOD FOOD NATION SURVEY. **PRICERUNNER. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

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HEAR THE ROAR

Some air fryers can be relatively noisy due to the fan and heating elements.

BRING ON THE BENEFITS

But it's definitely not all bad news. Used correctly, an air fryer could transform your health.

✢ **IT CAN HELP YOU SLIM**

'There can be up to a 90% reduction in the amount of oil left in food after air frying, compared with deep-frying,' says registered nutritional therapist Thalia Pellegrini.

✢ **THERE ARE FEWER HARMFUL CHEMICALS**

'Compounds called advanced glycation end-products (also known as AGEs) can be pro-inflammatory in the body and are associated with some chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's. Fewer are created with air-fry cooking compared to deep-frying,' says Thalia.

✢ **EXPERIMENTING IS EASY**

Air frying could also offer you new ways to enjoy vegetables and other foods that you might traditionally find 'boring'.

KEEP IT CLEAN

Only partially cleaning your air fryer after each use can leave remnants of oil inside. 'When repeatedly heated, they can become rancid and create trans fats,' warns Jenna Hope. 'Invest in air-fryer liners – they can help to keep the air fryer clean, and ensure you can make soups and stews in your air fryer too.' Plus, keeping it clean is vital to prevent odours, malfunctions and even fires.

Stubborn grease? Mix some baking soda with a little water to create a paste. Apply to any difficult areas and leave to soak for a few minutes before lightly scrubbing.

TIME-SAVING TRICKS

'When it comes to maintaining your healthy diet, preparation is key,' says nutritionist Jenna Hope. Follow her tips.

✢ Keep chopped veggies in your fridge ready to go straight into the air fryer for when you get home after a busy day.

✢ If your air fryer is large, follow the rule: cook once and eat twice (make two meals at once). You can also pre-marinate food the night before to save time too.

✢ Try to batch-cook. Things like roasted chickpeas or granola can be stored in an airtight container for a week or so, meaning you'll always have a healthy option.

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