

National Nutrition Month: Keep Dinner Lean With Pork; Chop, Chop: Supper's Simply Savory With the Leanest Pork

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Beginning in the 1980s, improved breeding and feeding practices and better trimming of fat, both by processors and in stores, has reduced the fat content in pork. Known for years as “the other white meat,” today’s pork is as lean or leaner than chicken. In fact, a three-ounce serving of pork tenderloin contains just 2.98 grams of fat, making it as lean as a skinless chicken breast and meeting the government’s guidelines for “extra lean.” Look for the word, “loin,” on the label for the leanest cuts.

A three-ounce serving of pork, approximately the size of a deck of cards, packs a lot of nutrition, making it a healthy choice from the Meat and Beans Group of MyPyramid. An excellent source of protein, pork also is rich in thiamin, niacin, riboflavin, vitamin B-6, phosphorus, potassium, and zinc.

For best quality and food safety, cook fresh pork cuts within two to three days; ground pork, one to two days. Whole smoked ham and whole ham slices can be stored in the refrigerator for three to four days or the “use by” date on the label. Smoked sausages, hot dogs, bacon, and other luncheon meats can be kept for up to seven days.

Follow these steps when freezing pork to maintain flavor and quality:

- Use specially-coated freezer paper (place the waxed side against the meat); heavy-duty aluminum foil; heavy-duty polyethylene film; or heavy-duty plastic bags
- Re-wrap pork in useable portions. Leave roasts whole, wrap chops in meal-size packages, and shape ground pork into patties. Put a double layer of waxed paper between chops and patties.
- Cover sharp bones with extra paper to prevent the bones from piercing the wrapping.
- Wrap meat tightly, pressing out as much air from the package as possible.
- Label with the pork cut name and date.
- Freeze at 0 degrees F or lower.
- Roasts, chops, and tenderloins can be frozen for up to six months; ground pork, for up to three months.

Defrost pork in the refrigerator to cut down on bacterial growth. For small roasts, allow three to five hours per pound. Allow four to seven hours per pound for large roasts. One-inch thick chops will take 12 to 14 hours. Ground pork will vary depending on thickness.

Pork is a versatile meat that can be used in a variety of dishes. These colorful dishes are quick, easy, flavorful, and nutritious.

### **ITALIAN CUPBOARD SOUP**

Serves 4

2 boneless top loin pork chops, cubed

1 15-ounce can chopped tomatoes, undrained

2 14-1/2-ounce cans chicken broth

2 tablespoons dried minced onion

1 15-ounce can cannellini or great Northern beans, drained

8 ounces fresh spinach leaves, torn

In a deep saucepan, brown the pork in a small amount of canola oil; add all ingredients except spinach; bring to a boil, lower heat and simmer for 15 minutes; stir in torn spinach and cook for two additional minutes. Top servings with grated Parmesan or Romano cheese.

### **AUTUMN APPLE CHOPS**

Serves 4

4 top loin pork chops

1 tablespoon flour

2 teaspoons margarine or butter

1/2 sliced onion

1 cup apple juice

Season flour with a little salt and pepper; lightly flour pork chops and brown on one side in margarine or butter in non-stick skillet over medium heat. Turn chops; stir in onion and apple juice; bring to a boil. Lower heat, cover, and simmer for seven to eight minutes.

### **PEACHY PORK PICANTE**

Serves 4

4 boneless top loin pork chops, cubed

2 tablespoons taco seasoning

1 cup salsa

4 tablespoons peach preserves

Toss pork with taco seasoning; lightly brown pork in a non-stick skillet over medium-high heat; stir in salsa and preserves, bring to a boil, lower heat, cover, and simmer eight to ten minutes.

Sources: National Pork Producers Council, <http://www.nppc.org>  
National Pork Board, <http://www.theotherwhitemeat.com>