



From Our Kitchen to Yours Happy New Year!

WE ARE HAPPY TO KICK OFF THE NEW YEAR by sharing some of our favorite food memories and recipes with you!



Alejandra Marín Santos: In Colombia we do not have seasons; however, the holidays are celebrated with lots of comfort food and sweet delicacies for a balanced meal with options for everyone's taste. The spread for Christmas and New Year's is filled with homemade sweets, baked goods, sauces, salads, vegetables and main entrees. *Patel de Carne*, similar

to a meatloaf, is one of my mother's specialties and it's a favorite in my family. It's easy to make and delicious! Use the meat of your choice or a combination of different kinds. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Catherine Stafford: Winter is my favorite season to cook. I enjoy making family recipes my mom made when I was a kid. We had big family dinners every night, all year long, and I remember the familiar sound of someone yelling out "wash your hands and get in your chairs" every evening around 6:00. Meals were not fancy, but we played hard, so we were hungry which always makes a meal delicious. My dad's favorite was chili. My mom made an easy *Chili* recipe and he would crush saltine crackers over the top. I still make this chili in the winter; I just don't triple it to feed 10 like my mom did!

Cecilia Sequeira: I love cooking, but mostly in the winter when I don't have to worry about the house getting too hot! As a child I remember pulling up my little stool to see over the counter and learn the family recipes. Now, with a family of my own we have created a new tradition,

(continued on page 2)

DID YOU KNOW?

January is Birth Defects Awareness Month

- Birth defects affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States each year.
- A healthy diet before and during pregnancy can prevent some birth defects. Focus on getting enough folic acid, iron, iodine and choline.
- Lead is toxic to humans.
- Young children (under 6) are particularly vulnerable to the toxic effects of lead and can suffer permanent adverse health impacts.
- Most children get lead poisoning from eating chips of lead-based paint that has cracked and peeled in homes built before 1978.
- In 2021, lead exposure was responsible for more than 1.5 million deaths globally.
- UNICEF estimates that up to 800 million children, or nearly a third of the world's children, are affected by lead poisoning.

INSIDE:

- Lead in Cinnamon
- Quicker Caramelized Onions
- Recipes
- Food Funny

From Our Kitchen to Yours Happy New Year!

— Continued from front page

at least once a month we try a new recipe. My son and daughter are always looking for recipes, they will go to their dad and write down the ingredients, then together we venture into international grocery stores to look for spices and ingredients we didn't know existed. This is a favorite for us all, *Locro de Zapallo – Squash Stew*.

Cintha Morales: Growing up in a close-knit small town, our family would often share meals together. One vivid childhood memory is my aunt making the traditional Peruvian dish *Ensalada Rusa*. The vibrant colors and enticing aromas always fascinated me. This salad has since become one of my favorite Peruvian dishes to prepare. I enjoy getting creative with the recipe, experimenting with different variations of veggies and fruits. It's a big hit with my family, who participate in the preparation whenever I make it. I encourage everyone to make it their own.

Setel Holden-Villars: When I was a child, my family and I moved to Spain for a couple of years while my mother pursued her PhD. The local grocery store sold a soup mix called *Sopa Jardinera*. It was simple, but it was the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted. When we moved back to the US, my mom started making it for me from scratch. A simple recipe made of broth, pasta shells, mixed vegetables, cilantro and spices. To this day it fills me with nostalgia and comfort, and it's a dish she lovingly makes me every time I go back home.

Xiuling (Ling) Goble: One of my favorite foods is *Hot Pot*. I like it because it's a nutritious meal with lean proteins, fresh vegetables, healthy broth and less oil. It has various flavors from spicy to mild or herbal and it can be created with your own flavor as well. Hot pot is perfect for gatherings of family and friends with everyone sitting around the pot. Sharing food and chatting creates a warm and interactive atmosphere. I always take a picture of everyone gathered around the food with the steaming pot, those are beautiful pictures with good memories!



Yuanwei (Yoanna) Jia: I believe food preferences are rooted in childhood and children enjoy cooking activities. I remember helping my mom to make wraps when she was making Jiaozi (dumplings). My mom likes vegetables, so we always made *Vegetable Jiaozi*. It was fun. I learned and played at the same time which has given me a love for cooking and eating vegetables. When I worked as a preschool teacher, I liked to set up a curriculum related to food or cooking. The children were always excited to learn about and try new foods. Dumpling wraps are available in Asian stores so making dumplings is much easier. Have fun!

We hope you enjoy these recipes, from our kitchen to yours... [Click here to view our recipes!](#)

— Child Health and Nutrition Staff

KIDS' HEALTH & SAFETY

Lead in Cinnamon

LEAD EXPOSURE IN YOUNG CHILDREN can lead to serious health issues. Lead's toxic effects can cause problems with behavior, learning and development. In both child care centers and home settings, lead exposure sources include lead-based paints in older buildings, lead dust, lead-contaminated drinking water, lead in soil (especially near major roadways), lead-glazed ceramics, lead on food packaging and lead in children's toys and jewelry (mainly those that are antique and/or imported). However, children can also consume food and candy that contains lead.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently found high lead levels in popular cinnamon products. The FDA began investigating after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found lead in cinnamon applesauce pouches. The pouches sickened about 500 children in 2023. The FDA has since issued several alerts that list contaminated cinnamon products. Many of these have been recalled and removed from store shelves. The FDA continues to test cinnamon products and more alerts may come that identify additional brands.

WHY ARE SOME CINNAMON PRODUCTS CONTAMINATED WITH LEAD?

- Unintentional contamination can occur during the product's growing, harvesting or processing cycle. Cinnamon is usually grown in countries outside of the United States. These countries may have lead contamination in the soil and water from pollution.
- Some suppliers intentionally add lead to spices like cinnamon to increase their weight. Since these products are sold by weight, this boosts profits.
- Adding lead to cinnamon enhances the color which makes it more appealing to shoppers.
- The equipment that processes cinnamon can contain lead. This can contaminate the cinnamon during grinding.



WHAT CAN WE DO TO LIMIT LEAD EXPOSURE?

- Opt for cinnamon-free food products (e.g., applesauce, fruit pouches, baked goods, etc.).
- Use whole cinnamon sticks instead of store-bought ground products. Sticks are less likely to be contaminated and can be ground at home using a high-speed blender, mortar/pestle or spice/coffee grinder.
- Eat a healthy diet. Diets should include a variety of foods that contain nutrients such as iron, vitamin C and calcium to limit lead absorption.

Although food alerts on lead in cinnamon and cinnamon products is alarming, this information will assist you in making informed decisions on selecting safer food products for the children in your care. Thank you for all you do to help keep children safe every day.

— *Eco Healthy Child Care*

Slow Cooker Chicken Soup

Chicken breasts or thighs, boneless, skinless	1 1/2 lbs	Bay leaves	2
Carrots, sliced	4	Thyme	1/2 tsp
Celery, sliced	3	Chicken broth, (or stock) low sodium	8 cups
Onion, diced	1	Egg or spaghetti noodles, enriched	8 oz
Salt	1/2 tsp		
Pepper	1/4 tsp		

1. Add the chicken, carrots, celery and onion to the slow cooker. Stir in salt, pepper, bay leaves, thyme and chicken broth. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours or on high for 4 hours.
2. When the cooking time is up, shred the chicken with two forks right in the slow cooker. Cook the noodles according to their package directions, drain and add to the soup in the slow cooker. Stir and serve!

Yield: 8 servings

Meets requirement for meat/meat alternate, vegetable and breads/grains

Spinach and Ham Quiche

Pie crust, enriched, unbaked	1	Ham, cooked, diced	6 oz
Eggs, large	6	Cheddar cheese, shredded, divided	1 1/2 cups
Milk	3/4 cup	Spinach, raw, roughly chopped	1 cup
Salt	3/4 tsp	Green onions, sliced	3 Tbsp
Pepper	1/4 tsp		

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Unroll pie crust and press into a 9 inch pie plate, crimping the top edges if desired.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, salt and pepper.
3. Sprinkle ham, 1 cup of cheese, spinach and green onions into the pie crust and pour the egg mixture over top. Sprinkle remaining 1/2 cup cheese on top of egg mixture.
4. Bake for 35–40 minutes until the center is completely set. Let cool for 5–10 minutes before slicing and serving.

Yield: 12 servings

Meets requirement for meat/meat alternate



Kickin' it in the Kitchen

QUICKER CARAMELIZED ONIONS

Caramelized onions are a delicious condiment but a laborious process. Onions have lots of naturally occurring sugars and amino acids, which with low heat, caramelize, or take on a darker color and sweeter flavor. Cook onions too little, and they won't develop that sweetness; cook them too hot, and those sugars can burn. However, there's one simple step that will speed up the process and make it fool-proof.



Typically, you sauté onions in butter on low heat, stirring constantly for close to an hour! A better method is to add a big batch of sliced onions to a skillet (preferably nonstick) with a little oil and 1/2–3/4 cup water. Once the water is boiling, cover the pan and continue cooking to steam the onions. It takes at least 10 minutes to evaporate the water, but this massively speeds up the process of wilting the onions. In addition, the water at the bottom becomes infused with all the sugary onion juices. Uncover and continue cooking about 15 minutes on medium low heat, stirring regularly, to scrape up the “fond”, the brown bits, until the onions are beautifully dark golden brown and sweet.



Child Health & Nutrition Program
1035 Detroit Avenue, Ste 200, Concord, CA 94518
(925) 676-6117 (Fax) 676-5829

Program Director Catherine Stafford
Graphic Designer..... Abe Cruz

CHILD HEALTH & NUTRITION SPECIALISTS
Co-Editor Alejandra Marín Santos
Co-Editor Setal Holden-Villars
..... Cecilia Sequeira
..... Xiuling Goble
..... Yuanwei Jia
..... Cinthya Morales

GRANTS COORDINATOR
..... Kathryn Lenhart

Food Q. Why is it dangerous to be an apple?
Funny A. Because they're always out on a limb!