

Cooking with Healthy Girl: Everyday Recipes Made Healthy

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As a young mother, Potter decided that she needed to eat better and understood that, with the demands of her schedule, she needed more than a fad diet. Her goal was to change her habits of eating and make her kitchen a healthier place for herself and her family. She began by swapping unhealthy foods and cuts of meat with healthier ones, adding more fruits and vegetables, and switching to good fats. Inspired by the results, she decided to put together a cookbook to help other parents who found themselves in a similar situation.

An accounting of dietary requirements accompanies each recipe: calories, fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, fiber, sugar and protein. In addition, Potter smartly adds the number of Weight Watchers points for people who may be using the cookbook to pursue that style of weight loss. The layout is attractive, with a number of color photographs and easy to read recipes accompanied by a quick blurb detailing Potter's thought process in making the dish healthier. As the subtitle suggests, the recipes are largely familiar, middle-America fare including a number of tasty baked goods and easy weeknight meals like spaghetti, burgers, tacos, meatloaf and chicken potpie. Some of the recipes don't really seem to merit inclusion, like the banana oatmeal entry which basically combines bananas with oatmeal. In fact, several others also feel like filler.

The biggest failures of the book are two-fold: first, the recipes are mostly pedestrian. Yes, choosing family favorites is a good idea, but none of these recipes really offers anything new to integrate into the meal rotation. Secondly, the notion of health seems a bit of a stretch. Switching to a "healthier" cut of bacon does not negate the fact that one is eating bacon. The same can be said about adding a wheat bun to a bacon cheeseburger. The successful projects currently on bookstore shelves are popular because the recipes are more inclusive and visionary. For example, how can more vegetables be added and how can the bacon be eliminated entirely? How can sodium be lowered and flavor maintained? The premise of Potter's book is about little changes; however, some of the changes are simply too little. In addition, the point values are fairly high for a number of the breakfast foods. One small muffin packs five points and won't sustain the body for very long.

Ultimately, the book is attractive and easy to use, and the recipes are tasty if a bit overly familiar. Healthy Girl's advice about little changes is good, but the advice is that which Americans have been hearing for years.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (February 7, 2011)

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