



Strategies for a Healthy Hot Pot Meal

In autumn and winter, many restaurants offer all-you-can-eat hot pot meals. A hot pot meal usually features pork bone soup, fatty beef and meatballs, all of which are high in energy and fat. When in a buoyant mood, people tend to overeat. This inadvertently leads to a higher intake of fat and energy. In fact, a hot pot meal can be quite healthy as long as you choose the soup bases and ingredients wisely.

Soup bases

Some soup bases like the pork bone soup and Sichuan-style spicy soup are greasy. When being boiled in a hot pot, meat releases grease into the soup base, increasing its fat content. Excessive intake of fat results in a higher risk of obesity. In addition, the saturated fat in meat is even harmful for cardiovascular health and increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Recommendations: Avoid drinking hot pot soup in which meat has been boiled. To reduce fat intake, choose tofu and coriander soup, tomato and potato soup, or soya milk soup.

Ingredients

Increase the portion of vegetables and noodles

In accordance with the principle of healthy eating, more grains and vegetables should be included in the diet. However, when choosing ingredients for a hot pot meal, most people go for fatty and processed meats, such as fatty beef, mutton, meat dumplings with fish skin, cuttlefish balls and sausages, thereby increasing fat and sodium intake.

Recommendations:

- Include a variety of vegetables in your hot pot meal, such as leafy vegetables, turnips, shiitake mushrooms and enokitake mushrooms. Remember that your hot pot meal should contain a larger portion of vegetables and a smaller portion of meat.
- Include grain products such as udon noodles, rice noodles and shirataki (konjac) noodles. These food items are filling and keep you from eating too much meat as a result of feeling hungry.
- Choose low-fat meats and alternatives such as fresh fish slices, seafood, beef shank and tofu. The portion of meat for each person should be three to four taels (i.e. the size of three to four table tennis balls) a meal. If you are going to have a hot pot meal in the evening, you can have less meat for lunch and save the meat for dinner.

Cut down on the use of seasonings

When having a hot pot meal, some people dip the food in high-sodium sauces, such as sacha sauce or satay sauce. Excessive sodium intake increases the risk of developing hypertension.

Recommendations: Cut down on the use of seasonings whenever possible and enjoy the authentic fresh taste of the ingredients. If your food is bland in taste, you can prepare a dipping sauce by mixing a little bit of soy sauce with shallot, ginger, garlic or chilli.

Cut down on the consumption of sugary beverages

During a hot pot meal, most people drink sugary beverages such as soft drinks, juices, sour-plum drink, sugar cane juice and “sugar cane and cogon grass root” drink. However, to avoid weight gain caused by excessive intake of energy and sugar, it is advisable to drink these beverages as little as possible.

Recommendations: Drink water, sugar-free tea or diet soft drinks instead of sugary beverages. When preparing homemade Chinese beverages such as sour-plum drink, be aware of the amount of sugar you add.

Since hot pot soup bases, offal meats and shellfishes (e.g. scallops, oysters and mussels) are relatively high in purines, people with gout should stay alert and limit their consumption of these food items to avoid worsening their condition.