



COOKING WITH CLASS

The most delicious med school course. *By Beth Weinhouse*

The students are gathered around a table, sharp knives slicing into still flesh. But it's not a dissection, and what's in front of the students isn't a cadaver. Instead it could be a piece of lean chicken, or a ripe tomato, or a crunchy apple. And when the class is over, the students don't just have notes to study. . . but a tasty meal to share.

Yes, this is a medical school class, albeit a very unusual one. These are students at the Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, and the program they're participating in is the first one of its kind in the country—perhaps the world. The Goldring Center for Culinary Medicine at Tulane aims to teach medical students about nutrition in a new way—through cooking—so that they can live a healthy lifestyle themselves. . . and help their patients to do the same.

"Research says that when doctors talk the talk and walk the walk,



patients are a lot more likely to follow suit,” says Chef Leah Sarris, the Goldring Center’s program director. “We want doctors to talk about food rather than nutrients when they’re discussing it with patients, on a level people can actually understand and relate to.”

The nation’s first culinary medicine program began in 2012, conceived and founded by Tim Harlan, MD, a chef turned internist who was then dean of the Tulane medical school. Dr. Harlan recognized that doctors were struggling to talk to their patients about diet—not surprising since most had received fewer than 20 hours of nutrition instruction in med school. “The Institute of Medicine recommends just 25 hours [of nutritional education] over the course of four years of medical school,” he told the local *Times-Picayune*. “And only 27 percent of medical schools reach those 25 hours.”

Chef Sarris became involved when Dr. Harlan, now the executive director of the Goldring Center, visited Johnson & Wales, a culinary

school in Rhode Island, where Chef Harris was then teaching. “We’re pretty sure I’m the first chef to be employed [as a teacher] by a medical school,” says Sarris.

Currently about one third of the Tulane med students opt to take the elective course, and there is a discussion about making it a requirement. And last year the program moved to a new 5000-square foot teaching kitchen inside the ReRefresh Project, a community center. The eight cooking stations can accommodate more students at a time than previously. A sign on the door carries a quotation from Hippocrates: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

The program also offers classes free to the community, and medical students help in the teaching. But the Goldring Center is attracting attention far beyond New Orleans and Louisiana. So far the program has been licensed to nine other medical schools, with dozens of others expressing interest.

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The food world is taking notice, too. In October 2014 Dr. Harlan helped plan and prepare dinner for the James Beard Foundation's 2014 Leadership Awards in New York City. As always combining his roles of chef and professo, he also delivered a lecture entitled "A Doctor's Perspective on Food and Health."

But the Goldring Center's mission is aimed squarely at home cooks, who are the front lines in the nation's battle against obesity, diabetes, and other chronic health conditions. Here's some easy at-home advice from the experts at the Goldring Center:

- Use fresh herbs generously: They bring vibrancy and dimension to food without adding fat and calories.
- Bump up the acid to reduce sodium intake: Adding a splash of citrus juice or vinegar amplifies food flavors as much as salt does.
- Always measure oil rather than just pouring it into a pan: Since a tablespoon has around 120 calories, this one step can save hundreds of calories.

Now get into the kitchen and start cooking! **P**

The Goldring Center's website is full of recipes for everything from beverages and breakfasts to entrees and desserts. With names like French Toast Casserole, Lemon Biscuits, and Creamy Chicken Salad, the recipes effectively make the point that healthy food can taste delicious, too. Added bonus: All of the food is relatively easy to prepare.



SPAGHETTI WITH MEAT & LENTILS

INGREDIENTS:

12 OZ	dried whole wheat spaghetti
¼ LB	brown lentils, dried
1 TBSP	olive oil
1 SMALL	yellow onion, chopped small
2 CLOVES	fresh garlic, minced
½ EACH	red bell pepper, chopped small
1 STALK	celery, chopped small
4 OZ	mushrooms, chopped small
½ LB	ground beef
1 (15 OZ) CAN	tomato sauce
1 TSP	Worcestershire sauce
1 CUP	water
1/8 TSP	kosher salt
2 TSP	Italian seasoning
¼ TSP	ground black pepper

CHEF SARRIS SAYS THAT THE lesson for the first class is the same, regardless of whether the students come from the medical school or the community. "It's just about spaghetti," she explains. "That's a comfort food that everyone is familiar with. We start with what I call the lunch lady version—white pasta and sauce with meat. Then we make changes throughout three other versions. The second version substitutes whole wheat pasta for white, cuts the amount of meat in half, and adds mushrooms and

vegetables. The third version also incorporates lentils in the sauce. The fourth version takes out the beef entirely."

Chef Sarris explains that the class then compares the four versions, discussing the nutritional differences, how they taste, how they look. "Across the board, people in the class prefer one of the versions that isn't the original," she says. "So it's not just better for health, but it looks and tastes better, and is less expensive, too." To try version #3 for yourself, check out the recipe here.

PREPARATION:

1. Gather all the ingredients and equipment.
2. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil and add lentils. Cook until lentils are tender, about 15 minutes. Remove lentils and reserve water. Set lentils aside.
3. Add water back to the pot. Add additional water if necessary to boil spaghetti. Once water comes back to a boil, add spaghetti and cook until al dente, about 8-10 minutes. Once cooked, toss with ½ teaspoon of oil and set aside.
4. Heat remaining oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion and beef. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onions are soft and beef is no longer pink.
5. Add the remaining ingredients, except for the spaghetti, and bring to a simmer. Simmer about 10-15 minutes.
6. Serve ¾ cup of sauce over ¾ cup of pasta. Makes 7 servings.