Healthy parchment paper recipes

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The two most common obstacles to getting a healthy meal on the table? Time and effort. The solution? Parchment paper. Meals prepared in a parchment paper pouch (sometimes referred to by the French term “en papillote”) may seem fancy, but this simple method is ideal for those with busy schedules, small kitchens or anyone tired of doing a sink full of dishes.

This “dinner in a bag” method requires wrapping a protein of your choice along with vegetables tossed in seasoning, in a parchment paper packet. The packet can then be cooked in the oven or on the grill. Food essentially steams inside the packet. The flavor comes from ingredients you choose to add, like citrus and herbs, which ensure tender and juicy results.

Parchment paper is a disposable non-stick surface that is resistant to grease, moisture and heat. You can buy a roll at most grocery stores (found near the foil and plastic wrap), or you can purchase pre-cut parchment sheets or cooking bags online. Parchment paper should not be confused with wax paper. Waxed paper is not mean for use in the oven, as the wax coating will melt if exposed to direct heat and burn.

Cooking in parchment is very healthy, as you do not need to add much oil or fat to the packets. It’s also a convenient way to cook for one or many. Each pouch is usually one serving, and packets can be prepared ahead of time and baked when guests arrive. You can also customize each pouch, which is helpful for picky eaters or those with food allergies.

When you “pouch” your meal, leave food at least one inch from the edge of the packet and do not overstuff it. You will need to fold and seal the pouch tightly so all the ingredients stay inside and a tight seal is created for the steaming process. If the seal is not tight, your dinner will not cook properly or quickly. (You may want to watch a how-to video on YouTube before making your packets for the first time.)

Once you’ve mastered the basics, have fun with these recipes:

**Lemon Pepper Salmon with asparagus & red onion**

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 14 minutes

Ingredients for two servings:

8 stalks of asparagus, trimmed each stalk cut in half

2 tablespoons thinly sliced red onion

Two 6 oz. Sockeye Salmon fillet

4 teaspoons olive oil

6 thin slices of lemon

Sea salt and pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare large oval of parchment paper (cut it 12”X18”) and fold it in half, then open it like a book.

Place asparagus pieces and red onion slices on one half of the parchment paper. Drizzle 1 teaspoon of olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Place one salmon fillet on the vegetables. Drizzle the salmon with 1 teaspoon olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Top with 3 lemon slices (you can add thyme, parsley or basil here). Fold the parchment paper over and starting at one corner start pinch the edges over tightly to close the packet. (When the edges are completely closed it will look like a calzone.)

Place the packet on a sheet pan and bake for 14 minutes on the center rack in the oven. Remove from oven and unwrap carefully (the steam will be hot coming out of the pouch!). You can cut off the top of the packet and serve in the paper, or you can unwrap and move the content to a plate.

*Tip: You can also add thinly sliced potatoes as the bottom layer.*

**Greek chicken**

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 35 minutes

Ingredients for two servings:

1/2 cup packed fresh baby spinach leaves

4 slices of tomato or cherry tomatoes cut in half

2 boneless skinless chicken breast

1/4 teaspoon oregano

1/4 teaspoon onion powder

1/2 cup feta cheese

Sea salt and pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Prepare large oval of parchment paper (cut it 12”X18”) and fold it in half, then open it like a book.

Place the chicken breast on the parchment paper and season with salt and pepper. Place ¼ cup spinach on each chicken breast then the tomatoes. Season with salt, pepper, oregano, onion powder and crumble the feta cheese over it.

Fold the parchment paper over and starting at one corner pinching the edges over tightly to close the packet. (When the edges are completely closed it will look like a calzone.) Bake for about 35 minutes.

*Tip: You can also add 1/8 cup sliced black olives to this.*

Many more parchment recipes can be found online. Some of my favorites include: halibut or cod with pesto and zucchini, ginger mango chicken, shrimp scampi, ginger shrimp and broccoli, lamb with potatoes and green beans, chicken legs with white beans and collard greens, and chicken with whole-grain mustard and vegetables.