Creating a Healthy Charcuterie Board

Charcuterie Background

Charcuterie (pronounced “shahr-ku-te-ree”) is translated from French and means “delicatessen.” The same is true for the Italian word salumeria, which is where salumi, or “cured meats,” comes from. Charcuterie is a branch of the culinary arts devoted to various cured meat products made primarily from pork. A charcuterie store sells cold cuts and other processed meat products. Examples of these meats include pâtés, bacon, sausage, and ham. Due to the recent interest in creating charcuterie boards, people often use the term “charcuterie” to refer to an assortment of meats paired with cheeses, fruits, vegetables, toast or crackers, and sauces creatively displayed on a serving dish or board. A charcuterie board is an assortment of food that creates a beautiful, delicious, and fun appetizer or meal. What’s wonderful about creating a charcuterie board is that it is not difficult, the possibilities are endless, and you can include everyday ingredients from your pantry. Additionally, the ingredients you use can be a part of a healthy eating plan.

One of the recommendations from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate is to consume a “Healthy Eating Pattern,” which includes:

• A variety of vegetables (dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other vegetables)
• Fruits, especially whole fruits
• Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
• Fat-free or low-fat dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese, and fortified soy beverages)
• Protein foods such as lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; beans, peas, and lentils; and nuts, seeds, and soy products
• Oils, particularly those high in unsaturated fats

A healthy dietary pattern should limit saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium.
The Parts

The Board and Serving Parts

Set the stage with the board. Consider a board with raised sides to keep food from falling off the edges. Anything can be used for the board, including common kitchen tools like a turn table, pizza paddle, cutting board, sheet pan, or serving platter. Boards marketed as charcuterie boards are also available for purchase. Keep safe food handling in mind and choose a board that can fit easily inside your refrigerator once assembled. Condiments should be served in small dishes and placed on the board. Secondhand stores and antique shops are great places to find low-cost options for fun serving dishes like ramekins. Along with small dishes, think about serving spoons and having several cheese knives.

Cheese

Cheese can be a savory component of the board, depending on the type of cheese selected, maybe also spicy—component of the board. As with the protein, include a variety of cheeses from hard to soft and mellow to sharp. The recommended amount of cheese is 1 or 2 ounces of cheese per person. Add visual appeal to the board by cubing some cheeses and serving others in wedges.

Make it part of a Healthy Eating Pattern! Look for low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Choose natural cheeses, such as cheddar, Gouda, Colby, and goat cheeses, rather than processed cheeses like American cheese and cheese spreads, which are significantly higher in sodium.

Fruit and Vegetables

Fresh fruit adds something sweet and a pop of color to a charcuterie board. Think about what is in season as well as what pairs with the savory portions of the board. During winter holidays, add fresh cranberries; in the summertime, fresh local berries make a great addition. Dried fruits like apricots, cherries, and dates are great year-round options. Vegetables can also add color to a board and give guests another healthful option. Sliced cucumbers, colorful bell peppers, and baby carrots are just a few options to add more variety and appeal to the board. When adding finishing touches, fresh herbs like a sprig of rosemary or mint can add a pop of green and really pull the board together.

Make it part of a Healthy Eating Pattern! To follow the recommendations of a healthy eating pattern, start with produce as the focus of the board. Include a variety of fruits and vegetables from several of the subgroups: dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other vegetables.

Whole Grains

Adding crackers or bread to the board is important so guests can use them as a base to build upon. Whole-grain crackers, pita, lavash, rusks, pretzels, or a sliced and toasted baguette are other options.

Make it part of a Healthy Eating Pattern! For a healthier option, choose whole grains. Look for a “Whole Grain” stamp on the package, which identifies the amount of whole grain in the product. Also check for “whole” as the first word on the ingredient list, no matter the type of grain.

Creative Condiments

Condiments could include jams, jellies, preserves, different types of mustards, dips like spinach or artichoke dip, dill or sweet pickles, a variety of olives, tzatziki, hummus, and so forth. When choosing condiments, select flavors from sweet to spicy that would pair well with the cheeses, protein foods, fruits, and vegetables on the board.

Nuts and Seeds

Nuts and seeds are a great filler on a board that also count as a protein source. Sprinkle or arrange them around the various parts of the board or use small serving dishes to feature unsalted or lightly salted nuts and seeds.

Protein Foods

Protein options like meat, poultry, and seafood provide another savory component to a board. Add a variety of flavors depending on local availability.

Make it part of a Healthy Eating Pattern! Shift the focus of the board away from red and processed meats that are high in saturated fat. Instead, think of meat as garnish rather than the focus of the board, and choose lean meats, poultry, and seafood. A healthy dietary pattern consists of lower intakes of red and processed meats; therefore, choose the protein component of the board carefully to stay within MyPlate recommendations. Diets that are high in saturated fat and cholesterol can have negative health consequences.

Themes

To really wow the crowd, create a themed board. Anything from a cuisine-themed board to a pancake breakfast board to a seasonally inspired board is sure to impress!
Putting It All Together

Before preparing the board, find out if any guests have food allergies that must be considered. Wash hands with soap and water prior to handling food. Wash all fresh produce under cold, running water before assembling the board.

1. Choose the board.
2. Determine what type of serving dishes and utensils are needed.
3. Lay out the serving dishes and cheeses on the board.
4. Fill in the spaces with fresh fruits and vegetables.
5. Add in the whole grains.
6. Fill the serving dishes with the featured condiments.
7. Add nuts and/or seeds by arranging on board or placing in serving dishes.
8. Trim remaining space with lean meat, poultry, and seafood.
9. Garnish with fresh herbs.

A charcuterie board allows for imagination and creativity, and it is a great option for a healthy appetizer or meal.
### Build a Board of Your Own

#### Theme Ideas
- Seasonal or holiday
- Culinary theme (e.g., Mediterranean)
- Breakfast (e.g., pancake or waffle)
- Vegetable charcuterie board (e.g., emphasis on vegetables with meat and cheese as the garnish)
- Grilled vegetable charcuterie board

#### Cheese
- Fat-free or low-fat cheeses (e.g., fat-free or low-fat cheddar, Colby, or Gouda)

#### Fruits
- Fresh: Apple slices, blueberries, cranberries, pomegranate arils, grapes, raspberries, strawberries, kiwi, blackberries, pears, cantaloupe
- Dried: Apricots, cherries, cranberries, dates, pineapple, raisins, strawberries

#### Vegetables
- A variety of vegetables from the subgroups:
  - Dark green: broccoli
  - Red and orange: tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, red peppers
  - Beans, peas, and lentils: dips and spreads
  - Starchy: potatoes, corn, green peas, plantains, cassava
  - Other: green beans, cucumbers, celery, green pepper, mushrooms, avocado, cauliflower, olives, asparagus, beets, sugar snap or snow peas

#### Whole Grains
- Variety of whole-grain crackers (different shapes and sizes), pita, lavash, rusk, pretzels, small loaves of sliced bread (e.g., toasted baguette), waffles, or pancakes

#### Creative Condiments
- Black olives, green olives, marinated olives; marinated artichoke hearts; sweet pickles, dill pickles, spicy pickles; honey, jam, jellies, preserves; whole-grain mustard, honey mustard, deli-style mustard, horseradish mustard; hummus, tzatziki, bruschetta, salsa, olive oil, marinated mushrooms

#### Nuts and Seeds
- Almonds, cashews, pistachios, walnuts, peanuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds

#### Protein Foods
- Any variety of lean meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood (e.g., roasted turkey, rotisserie chicken, chicken salad, lean ham)

#### Herbs
- Rosemary, thyme, mint, basil

### Source