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## In the Kitchen, December 17

*Layered Salad*

*Talapia Baked in Mustard Sauce*

*Egg Noodles*

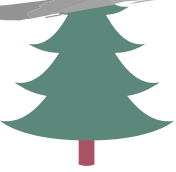
*Strawberry Muffins*

*Simple Pear Dumplings*

*We are indeed fortunate we have so much to eat.*

*Start tonight's meal with a layered salad you can prepare early in the day. The salad is beautiful in a clear glass bowl and includes lots of healthy vegetables. The economical talapia takes five minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to bake. The fish goes well with egg noodles—try whole-wheat, if you'd like more fiber in your diet—to soak up the sauce. You can boil the noodles in less time than the fish takes to bake. And as long as you have the oven on to cook the fish, how about baking a pan of strawberry muffins? They are inexpensive, mix up quickly, and are a wonderful treat with the baked fish. Speaking of treats, how about some pear dumplings for dessert? The comforting dumplings can bake in 10-15 minutes after you pull the fish and muffins from the oven. Pop them in and set the timer while you eat. They should be cool enough to eat plain after dinner, although, as with many warm desserts, a cooling bit of low-fat frozen yogurt or ice cream might be nice.*





## Layered Salad – Serves 8+

*This is an old recipe. I remember eating something similar at a family gathering during the time when I was in graduate school--almost as long ago as the dark ages (but not quite). This version is a bit lighter than the original but very similar. The salad is beautiful in a clear glass bowl. Just remember to tell people to dig deep to get all the good stuff at the bottom.*

*2 cups of fresh spinach, washed, and picked over*

*2 cups of baby lettuce greens*

*1-2 stalks of celery, chopped*

*1 cup of chopped tomato or cherry tomatoes, halved*

*1 small/medium red onion, chopped*

*1 cup of chopped or shredded carrots*

*1 red bell pepper, chopped*

*1 cup of frozen peas, thawed*

*½ cup of grated sharp cheddar cheese*

*Layer, in the order listed, all of the ingredients above in a large glass bowl. Combine the dressing ingredients listed below and spread the dressing on top of the peas and cheese. Garnish the top of the dressing with some chopped green onions and additional chopped tomatoes, if you like.*

### *Dressing*

*½ cup of low-fat mayonnaise*

*½ cup of fat-free Greek yogurt*

*2 tablespoons of bacon crumbles*

*2 tablespoons of sugar*

*2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar*

*¼ teaspoon of lemon pepper*





## Talapia Baked in Mustard Sauce – Serves 4

*This is a simple 20-minute main dish that tastes like you fussed. The creamy mustard sauce really wakes up the mild fish. Although the talapia is good with noodles, you could also serve the fish with rice, baked potatoes, or just some French bread to help soak up the tasty sauce.*

*1½ pounds of talapia fillets*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*1 teaspoon of olive oil*

*1 cup of light sour cream*

*2 tablespoons of grainy Dijon mustard*

*2-3 tablespoons of capers*

*1 teaspoon of brine from the capers*

*2 teaspoons of dried minced onions*



*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat a baking pan with non-stick spray. Place the talapia on the baking pan and brush or mist the fillets with olive oil. Sprinkle the fish with the salt and pepper. Combine the remaining ingredients. Divide the sour cream-mustard mixture among the fillets, spreading it to cover the tops of the fillets. Bake the fish for 15 minutes or until it flakes with a fork.*





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## Strawberry Muffins – Makes 12

*These muffins combine the sweetness of strawberry jam, the nuttiness of nutritious whole-wheat flour, and the gentle bite of lime zest. The muffins are a little different from the usual bakery fare and are a nice treat without going overboard on the sugar and fat. So you can enjoy the muffins without guilt for dinner, with your breakfast coffee, or for an evening snack. With their seasonal red and green colors, perhaps Santa might even appreciate one or two of the muffins to sustain him on his long trek.*

*1 cup of white whole-wheat flour*

*½ cup of flour*

*1½ teaspoons of baking powder*

*1/8 teaspoon of baking soda*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*¼ cup of sugar*

*1 egg*

*½ cup of low fat buttermilk*

*1 teaspoon of vanilla extract*

*Zest from 1 lime*

*1/3 cup of canola oil*

*¼ cup of strawberry jam, stirred to soften it*

*¼ cup of chopped walnuts*



*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat 12 muffin cups with nonstick cooking spray or use cupcake liners spritzed with spray. Combine the flours, baking powder, and salt. In a large bowl, whisk the sugar, egg, buttermilk, vanilla extract, lime zest, canola oil, and jam well. Add the dry ingredients to the wet and stir to moisten all the ingredients.*

*Divide the batter among the muffin cups and sprinkle the tops with the walnuts. Bake the muffins for 20-25 minutes or until they are golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the middle of a muffin comes out clean.*



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## Simple Pear Dumplings – Serves 8

*This is an almost instant dessert and is easy to make with everyday ingredients. The sweet, juicy pears are simply rolled up with a sugar and spice mixture in crescent roll dough. You don't even have to peel the pears unless you really want to do so or you're using pears with particularly hard skins. The little dumplings bake in 10-15 minutes to a perfect golden brown. Serve the dumplings warm, either plain or with a little low-fat frozen vanilla yogurt or ice cream. Any leftover dumplings are likely to be targets of opportunity for breakfast.*

*4 medium pears, cored and halved (and peeled, if you want)*

*1 tube of refrigerated crescent roll dough (8 rolls)*

*¼ cup of raw (turbinado) or brown sugar*

*½ teaspoon of cinnamon*

*½ teaspoon of ginger*



*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat a baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray. Combine the raw sugar, cinnamon, and ginger and sprinkle about a third of the mixture on a sheet of waxed paper. Separate the crescent rolls into triangles and flatten each one slightly on the sugar/spice sprinkled waxed paper. Sprinkle another third of the sugar/spice mixture on the top of the crescents. Place a pear half on the wide end of each crescent, sprinkle the pears with the remaining sugar/spice mixture, and roll the pear halves up in the dough (the dough won't completely cover the pear halves). Place the rolled up pears on the baking sheet, with the point side of the dough facing down on the baking sheet. Bake the dumplings for 10-15 minutes until they're golden. Let the dumplings cool for 5 minutes before serving them.*



## December 18

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

*Isaiah 9: 6-7*

The click and clatter of the donkey's hoofs on the rock-strewn path of the road somehow blended with the steady wind coursing down from the northeast, chilled by the snow atop Mount Hermon, no longer in sight over their left shoulders. Surely Mary wondered, "how much longer, how much farther?" to Bethlehem. How could she forget the words of the heavenly messenger, "Don't be afraid!" Here on a seemingly endless road, incredibly young, far from home, about to deliver a child, Mary and Joseph took wearying step after step southward. We, too, can only wonder, "how much longer?"

As the Advent days pass and Christmas nears, our thoughts turn to family and tasks yet to be completed. The pages of recipes are reminders of other days of preparation. The aromas of baking and roasting send their messages, some of them helping us to recall other times, other words and faces, and other places. How much longer?





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# *DRAFT* In the Kitchen, December 18

*Fresh Carrots with Red Pepper Hummus*

*Chicken and Chickpea Skillet Supper*

*Fresh Fruit or Greek Yogurt Cake with Honey-Apple-Nut Sauce*

*Tonight we have a one-dish supper—simple, quick, nutritious, and delicious! The chicken and chickpea dish includes warm spices, spinach, and feta, with a bit of lemon to freshen it. It would go well with some little carrots to dip in creamy red pepper hummus. Fresh fruit—perhaps some oranges—would be an easy and healthy dessert. Nonetheless, if you'd like something fancier, how about a low-fat Greek yogurt cake? The cake has a subtle orange tang and needs to be made ahead and chilled thoroughly. You can, however, make the topping—if you choose to use one—while you cook the chicken skillet supper. A mixture of honey, walnuts, green apple, dried cranberries, and spices, the topping is sweet and tart, similar to the Jewish Charoset. Serve the topping warm and let it ooze slowly, glistening with sweet abandon, over the cold, tangy yogurt cake.*



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## Red Pepper Hummus – Serves 10-12

*Serve this hummus with fresh vegetables, pita, or even French bread or crackers. It's nutritious and so good and simple to make that you won't want to keep buying the stuff from the store (which is loaded with salt and strange preservatives with non-food-like names).*

*2 cans (15 ounces) of chickpeas, rinsed and drained*

*¼ teaspoon of garlic powder*

*2 tablespoons of tahini (or use olive oil)*

*½ teaspoon of salt*

*2-3 tablespoons of lemon juice*

*¼ - ½ cup of roasted red peppers, drained (from a jar is fine)*

*Water*

*Heat the chickpeas in a microwave safe bowl until they're warm. Place the chickpeas and the remainder of the ingredients in a food processor (or blender) and pulse until the hummus is thick and creamy. Taste the hummus and add more lemon juice if you think it's needed. You also may want to add a bit of water (a tablespoon at a time) to get the consistency you'd like.*





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## Chicken and Chickpea Skillet Supper – Serves 4+

*This is good, fast, cheap, and easy. It's a one-pan dish to serve when you get home late and need something nutritious that will fill you up but not out. If you don't have time to make the hummus (or just don't want to wash the food processor!), slice some tomatoes and maybe some bread to serve alongside the skillet supper and you've got dinner in about 20 minutes.*

*1 medium red onion, chopped*

*2 teaspoons of minced garlic (from a jar is fine)*

*1 pound of boneless skinless chicken breasts (or thighs) cut into 1-2-inch chunks*

*1 tablespoon of olive oil*

*1 can (15 ounces) of chickpeas, drained and rinsed*

*Zest and juice of a lemon*

*½ teaspoon of cumin*

*½ teaspoon of salt*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*¼ teaspoon of cinnamon*

*3-4 cups of fresh spinach (about ½ of a 10-ounce bag)*

*¼ cup of feta cheese*



*Heat a non-stick skillet over medium high heat and add the olive oil. Add the onion and sauté it for a few minutes until it begins to soften. Stir in the garlic, then move the onion/garlic mixture to the side of the pan and add the chicken to the center. Brown the chicken for a few minutes on each side. Add the chickpeas and sprinkle on the cumin, salt, pepper, and cinnamon. Stir gently to combine everything. Continue cooking the mixture a few minutes more or until the chicken is cooked through. Add half of the spinach to the pan and stir it into the chicken mixture. After the first batch of spinach wilts down, add the other half of the spinach and stir everything again. Stir in the lemon zest, lemon juice, and feta and serve the skillet supper.*