

Livermush full of nutrients, but enjoy in moderation

Are you protecting yourself and your family from COVID-19? I am seeing more people who have found their masks and are washing their hands more often, and hopefully eating healthy and being physically active. Be safe.

Whenever we visit my grandmother in the western part of the state, she serves us livermush. Can you tell me how livermush is made, and is it healthy? — *MG, Winterville*

I think I had my first livermush when working in rural areas of eastern Tennessee. My grandfather was a butcher in Detroit. (He did his training in Russia before immigrating to the U.S.) Eating livermush reminded me a lot of the Polish liverwurst I enjoyed as a child with my dziadzia, served on pumpernickel bread with a bit of mustard. My dad loved it, too, but Mom wouldn't touch it. I haven't had any in years, though I see livermush in the meat case in local stores. Julia Maple, an ECU



KATHY KOLASA

senior dietetic student, shares this information with you.

Livermush is a unique meal often enjoyed in western North Carolina. It is an organ meat-based dish that resembles meatloaf, hence the name. It is made up of a few simple ingredients: pig liver and additional pig trimmings, cornmeal and spices. Pig liver is the main component. Livermush is similar to a few other meat dishes, such as scrapple, meatloaf and liver pudding.

While the name "livermush" might not seem appetizing to most people, western North Carolinians take much pride in the dish. It is most popular among the elder population as the meal is deeply rooted in the history of the region. It was brought over by German immigrants in the 1700s who used to eat a similar dish called pan haus. German

immigrants traveled down the Appalachian Mountains until they landed in the Piedmont.

Pan haus (or pon hoss) grew in popularity as the dish was affordable and accessible. Pon hoss then became livermush and was served as a quick and easy lunch or breakfast for hard-working farmers and factory workers. Livermush also was a popular meal choice during the Great Depression, hence why the older population has a deep connection to the dish. It is most popularly served with eggs and a biscuit for breakfast or in between two slices of bread and yellow mustard for lunch.

To answer the question of "is livermush healthy," the answer truly varies depending on the portion size and how the dish is prepared or served. Liver by itself is one of the most nutritionally dense foods a person can eat. Liver is rich in protein, iron, zinc, B-vitamins such as vitamin B-12, vitamin A, copper, magnesium and selenium. Liver

meat is lower in saturated fat than most would guess, but high in dietary cholesterol.

It is important to keep in mind that pork products are considered red meat. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, red meat consumption should not exceed three portions a week, or about 12-18 ounces.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that saturated fat intake is less than 10 percent of total calories. If livermush is pan-seared with large amounts of butter, then the saturated fat content goes up significantly, reducing nutritional quality. Try air-frying livermush or pan-searing with light amounts of olive oil.

Liver meat is also very high in iron, Vitamin A and copper. Due to a high Vitamin A and copper content, eating too much liver can put an individual at risk for toxicity of these vitamins and minerals.

Livermush can be made at home or bought from a local

grocery store. The brand Neese's sells packaged livermush and can be found at local stores. In one 2-ounce (or 80 calorie) serving of Neese's livermush, there are 4 grams of fat, 1 gram of saturated fat, 8 grams of carbohydrates, 5 grams of protein, 290 mg of sodium, 2 grams of fiber and no added sugar. Daily sodium intake should be kept under 2,300 mg per adult and 1,500 mg for adults with hypertension.

Livermush can be a good source of protein, is low in carbohydrates and sugar, and the bit of fiber is a bonus. Of course, if you eat more than a 2-ounce slice, you will get more of all those nutrients.

Overall, enjoying livermush has many nutritional benefits, but like many traditional foods, it's not an everyday food. Enjoy in moderation.

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TASTEFOOD

Tasty dishes help prove that bowls aren't just for soup

Bowls are a popular and trendy category of food. The concept is simple: An individual serving bowl is arranged with various composed ingredients, such as cooked grains, vegetables, salads and proteins, that are connected by flavors and spices from regional cuisines. It's a satisfying and healthy sum of its individual parts — and fun to eat.

The variations are limitless, and the seasonings and cultural influences are the distinguishing factors. A bowl may contain fresh or stir-fried vegetables, pickles and



LYNDA BALSLEV

salsas, beans or legumes, rice or another grain and cooked proteins such as meat, chicken, tofu or shrimp.

This recipe is influenced by Southwestern cuisine. You can play with the ingredients and mix and match to your preference. Tofu, the main protein in the bowl, is a wonderful vessel for a marinade and, when cooked, its edges crisp, yielding a delightful texture. It's important to drain tofu and press it before cooking. This step removes any excess liquid, which ensures crispy results. Not a tofu fan? Skirt or flank steak, chicken or shrimp are great substitutions.

Note that the rice and salsa require advance preparation before assembling the bowl. They can be prepped while the tofu presses and marinates. They also make nice side dishes for other meals.

SOUTHWESTERN TOFU BOWL WITH CORN SALSA AND CILANTRO RICE

Active time: 1 hour
Total time: 1 hour plus draining and marinating time
Yield: Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1 (14-ounce) package extra-firm tofu
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 cup halved grape or cherry tomatoes
- 2 avocados, halved and sliced
- Cilantro sprigs
- Lime wedges

Marinade:

- 1 to 2 chipotles in adobo sauce, plus 2 tablespoons juice from the can
- 2 garlic cloves, grated or minced
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh



PHOTO BY LYNDA BALSLEV FOR TASTEFOOD

This Southwestern tofu bowl with corn salsa and cilantro rice is influenced by Southwestern cuisine. You can play with the ingredients and mix and match to your preference.

lime juice

- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce or tamari
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Rice:

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup long-grain white rice
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 1/2 cups cooked black beans or 1 (14-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- Kernels from 1 ear of yellow corn or 1 cup defrosted frozen corn
- 1 small poblano pepper, seeded, finely diced
- 1/2 small red onion, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder

- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, or more to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne

Preparation

Drain the tofu and slice each block in half. Place the tofu on a cutting board lined with a kitchen towel or paper towels. Place several layers of paper towels on top and weigh down with another cutting board. Let stand for at least 30 minutes to drain. Once drained, cut into bite-size cubes.

While the tofu is draining, combine the marinade ingredients in a food processor and process to blend.

Arrange the drained tofu in one layer in a baking dish. Pour the marinade over and turn the tofu to coat. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

While the tofu is marinating, make the rice. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the rice; stir to coat and lightly toast, 15 to 30 seconds. Add the water and salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low. Cover the pot and cook until the liquid is absorbed, about 20 minutes. Turn off the heat, remove the lid and place a kitchen towel over the pot. Cover with the lid and let stand for 5 minutes. Remove the lid and towel and fluff the rice with a fork. Add the cilantro and lime juice and fluff once more.

Combine the salsa ingredients in a bowl and mix to blend. Taste for seasoning. Heat a skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 tablespoon oil and swirl to coat. Arrange the tofu on the skillet and cook until browned on all sides, 6 to 8

minutes. Transfer to a plate and season with salt and black pepper.

Divide the rice between four serving bowls. Arrange the tofu, salsa, tomatoes and avocado over the rice. Drizzle with the reserved marinade, if desired. Garnish with additional cilantro and serve with lime wedges.

Lynda Balslev is an award-winning writer, cookbook author, and recipe developer based in northern California. Visit TasteFood at TasteFoodblog.com.



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