

The Cooking Primer: **A Taste of Korea**



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WHY KOREAN FOOD

A typical Korean meal boasts a variety of foods, a principle that coincides nicely with modern medicine's recommendations to eat a healthy variety of foods in moderation. As obesity is relatively uncommon in South Korea, the Korean diet is a potent example of how healthier eating habits can benefit North Americans.



Photo Credit: Elle Morre via Unsplash

A well-balanced Korean meal traditionally combines sweet, sour, bitter, hot and salty tastes. The conscientious Korean cook will aim at a spectrum of colors that represent the five basic elements. Green, white, red, black and yellow correspond to wood, metal, fire, water and earth.

The objective of Korean cooking is not to create meals that will result in overeating. On the contrary, the aim of Korean dining is the preparation of nutritious and tasty food that is meant to maximize health and protect an individual from disease.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOREAN FOOD

Korean food is directly related to the country's geography and climate. Located in a peninsula with a climate that is similar to the United States' North Central region, it features frosty winters and hot summers. As the country is mountainous and extends across the North Asian landmass towards the warmer seas in the south, it is a country of many micro-environments.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

In the valleys and glens, rice, beans, and vegetables are grown. While in the mountains, mushrooms and many wild plants are harvested.

As a consequence, cuisine varies from region to region. In the mountains, signature dishes have plenty of wild, indigenous ferns. While in the rice-growing valleys, rice dishes such as “Bibimbap” feature vegetables, meats and spicy sauces. Until the 20th century, vast swathes of Korea remained rural. Still today, travelling through Korea, one is struck by the use of the smallest plot of land to grow food, even next door to high rise buildings. As a consequence of this enduring culture of foraging and growing one’s own food, Koreans take pride in producing their own brand of healthy food. They also embrace traditional cooking methods such as fermentation, boiling, blanching, seasoning and pickling – all time-tested techniques that have been passed down through the generations.

TASTY BASICS

The Korean word for cooked rice is “bap”, which roughly translated means “meal.” Rice is the foundation on top of which most Korean meals are designed. With a few possible substitutes - noodles, porridge or dumplings - every meal is built around rice. The main dish or dishes, which can be meat, seafood, or tofu, are served buffet-style in the middle of the table with the rice.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Tofu, known as “dubu”, is prepared by coagulating soy milk and then pressing the resulting curds into solid white blocks of varying firmness. As a staple of traditional Asian cuisines, tofu has been a steady presence on the dinner table for more than 2,000 years. In Korean cuisine, “dubu” is often seasoned with soy sauce, garlic and other spices, and served with a dipping sauce.

Hearty Rice (“Japgokbap”)

Mike: I was a Jasmine rice kind of guy... Until Christine had me taste her healthier, Korean version. Typically sold as “Mixed 7 Grains” rice at the Korean grocery store, the idea is to supplement basic rice with other grains – the Asian version of multigrain bread. Koreans add 5 to 10 different types of grains to a base of white (or brown), short grain rice. Below is a list of what Christine normally uses... But if you need to make your own mix, consider adding: brown rice, brown sweet rice, wild sweet rice, black rice, barley, black pea, white pea, red bean (azuki, as it is smaller than kidney bean), sorghum, millet, Job's tears... Many possibilities! (If you do add beans or peas, make sure to add a touch more water during the boil).



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4-6 servings:

1 cup brown, short grain, sweet rice

1 cup Mixed 7 Grains (includes: brown rice, sweet brown rice, whole barley, wild sweet rice, sorghum, millet and sweet rice)

4 cups water

Mix brown rice with rice mix. Thoroughly rinse the rice mix in a sieve whose mesh can retain all this grainy goodness. Add rice and water to a medium sized pot. Bring to a boil on the stovetop. Cover and turn the heat down, way down. Let simmer for some 20min... Open lid and stir rice quickly to ensure it is not sticking to the bottom.

Add a touch of water if it seems too dry, cover and cook another 10-20min, re-doing this check a few times. You want to cook the rice and other grains through, but not to the point of it becoming mushy.

Soy-Based Tofu (“Dubu Jorim”)

Christine: It always saddens me when I hear friends (even Mike) complain about how boring tofu is... Thankfully, this simple, tasty tofu recipe fell into my lap recently. Armed with a new way of prepping this most versatile of plant-based proteins, I am happy to report that I have already made a convert (true story, just ask my ski buddy Dominic!) More converts to come, I sense it... By the way, this dish is better the next day as the flavors settle in overnight. Also, refrain from adding more salt or soy sauce after cooking. The reduced sauce should take care of salting your dish enough. Finally, I use “gochugaru”, a type of powdered chili mix from Korea... But if you can’t find any, powdered red chili flakes will do.

Makes 4 servings as a side dish. Double the recipe to use as a main course:

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon sugar (I use dehydrated cane sugar, i.e. sucanat... Or any type of sugar that is more natural than white)

1/2 teaspoon “gochugaru” (or powdered chili flakes)

2 tablespoons green onions or scallions, chopped

1 teaspoon garlic, finely minced

1/2 cup water

3 tablespoons olive oil (or grapeseed, peanut etc. Add more if necessary)

1 lb firm tofu, patted dry and sliced 1/2 inch thick, large bite-sized 2 teaspoons sesame oil

1 teaspoon sesame seeds (toasted and/or black) for garnish



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

In a small mixing bowl, combine soy sauce, sugar, “gochugaru” or powdered chili flakes, green onions and garlic with the water. Set aside. Heat the skillet with a bit of oil over medium heat. Brown the tofu as follows: position the slices slightly apart from each other so you may have access during flipping; brown for about 3 minutes on one side, flip, cook another 3 minutes. Depending on your skillet, you may need to add a bit of oil prior to cooking the second side. Guesstimate in how many batches you will be able to cook all the tofu, then add the appropriate ration of soy sauce mixture to each batch. Let simmer for 2-3 minutes on medium-high heat, basting the tofu if you can. The sauce should reduce slightly. Put this batch aside in a serving bowl, repeat until you’ve cooked all the tofu. Turn off the heat, garnish with the sesame oil and seeds. Serve hot, at room temperature, or even chilled. Can last 2-3 days in the refrigerator.

SPICY SALADS (“BANCHAN”)

You may have heard of “kimchi”, perhaps Korea’s most renowned food export. It is but one of the many varieties of salty, vinegary and slightly sweet chili flavored K-salads, known as “banchan”. These quintessential side dishes are what make a dinner spread truly Korean.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

In historical times, the number of “banchan” served during a meal was based on one’s status... Generally, between four to twelve different sides are part of a meal. Though it is said that royalty could command up to 100 varieties!

Korean food is renowned for its bold flavors, and how it balances out a meal with generous servings of vegetables. This is achieved in large part thanks to “banchan.” The most enticing thing about these Korean salads is how relatively easy they are to make, given the great taste and nutritional value they provide.

Classic Kimchi (“Won Bok Kimchi”)

If you're like us, this is probably the first dish that comes to mind when talking about Korean food... Similar to sauerkraut and some dill pickles, “won bok kimchi” is lacto-fermented, i.e. the cabbage is preserved through fermentation by beneficial bacteria. Packed with good probiotics, it helps digestion and can improve overall health. Have you been intimidated at the thought of making it yourself? We feel you. Thanks to a simple recipe we discovered, we successfully worked through our own, unfounded fears... The yummy, homemade kimchi sitting in our refrigerator is proof of that effort!

1 head napa cabbage (“won bok”), about 2 lbs

2 tablespoons salt

2 cloves garlic, finely minced

1 teaspoon fresh ginger, finely minced

2 tablespoons “gochugaru” (or powdered chili flakes)

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1/4 cup green onion, chopped into 1-2 inch pieces, about 2 stalks

2 1-quart (1 L) mason jars and lids

NOTE: Don't panic, but pressure may build up in the jars, especially if (like us) you forget them in the sun on the first day or two... Carefully open the jars to “burp” them, screw the lids back on, and carry on. (After a few days this will no longer be an issue). The volume of cabbage will diminish with time – so much so that you may want to combine the contents of the two jars into a single one.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Trim/remove the wilted outer leaves of the cabbage, if any. Wash this outer area. Slice in half, extract the stiff bottom stalk by cutting out of each half of the cabbage... Cut the cabbage lengthwise again, yielding four quarters. Chop these quarters crosswise, about 1.5 inches long. Arrange in a large bowl, sprinkle with the salt. Let sit, wilting, for 3-4 hours (the cabbage should lose some of its crunchiness). Prepare the rest of the ingredients in a small mixing bowl. Rid the cabbage of the salt by rinsing it with water. Drain and return to a large mixing bowl (preferably metal, as chili stains plastic). Add the mixture of ingredients to the cabbage and mix well. Pack the kimchi into the jars and close. Let sit (away from direct sunlight!) on your kitchen table for a full day (a bit longer if you wish for it to sour faster), then store in the refrigerator. Kimchi can be enjoyed relatively fresh, a few days or weeks old... Even once matured for a few months (this being the preferred phase for making “kimchi jjigae”, see section “Comforting Soups and Stews”).

Quick-Pickled Korean Radish Salad (“Moo Saengchae”)

With a bit of luck, you may have noticed Japanese radish (“daikon”) at your local grocery store - an elongated, mainly white, mild radish. You can use “daikon” in this salad... But for the real deal, strive to unearth “moo:” it is smaller, rounder, tinted green on top, tastes a bit stronger and is a bit more on the dense side than “daikon.” These types of radishes are especially enjoyable if you process them just a bit (vs eating them raw). Here we propose quick pickling... You can enjoy this salad as an appetizer “banchan...” Or as a condiment alongside grilled meats such as LA-style “kalbi” (see section “Flavorful Entrees”).



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4-6 servings as a “banchan” appetizer, or as a condiment for grilled meats:

1 1/2 lbs “moo” radish

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon garlic, finely minced

1 tablespoon “gochugaru” or powdered chili flakes

1/2 teaspoon sugar (preferably dehydrated cane sugar)

1/4 cup rice wine vinegar

1 scallion (or green onion), halved lengthwise and cut into thin slices

Remove the tops and any annoying endings from the radishes... Slice them in quarters, lengthwise. Then with your tool of choice (chef’s knife, mandoline, or even a food processor), slice these crosswise thinly (less than 1/4 inch). Transfer the slices to a medium mixing bowl, sprinkle with the salt. Toss with your hands to ensure you coat all the pieces. Let sit for 15 minutes. In a small mixing bowl, combine and mix the garlic, “gochugaru” or chili, sugar, rice wine vinegar, and scallions. Now that the radish is ready, drain in a colander, squeezing the water out with your hands. Wipe the inside of the radish mixing bowl. Return the radish to the bowl, add the tasty mixture. Again, work with your hands to ensure all the pieces get coated. (Use disposable gloves if you are weary of the red tint from the hot spice). Let sit for an hour. Serve at room temperature. Can last up to a week in the refrigerator.

NOTE: “moo” is the generic term for radish, in Korean... But it usually refers to the specific type of radish known as “joseon.”

Seaweed, Cucumber and Charred Leek Salad (“Miyeok Oi Muchim”)

When selecting the recipes for this little book, we deliberately opted for recipes relatively close in tastes and textures to Western food... Except perhaps for this one. There is seaweed in this salad. And it may feel a bit slimy! But fear not, the strong (and familiar) taste of the charred leek will balance it nicely... You can find seaweed, dehydrated, in ethnic-friendly grocery stores where it will be marketed as “wakame” (its Japanese name). And seriously, what on Earth is healthier than seaweed?



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4 to 6 small servings:

1/2 ounce dried “wakame”

1 medium leek - its base, and most of its tough green part trimmed off

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon garlic, finely minced

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1/4 cup apple cider vinegar

2 tablespoons sesame seeds

1/2 lb English cucumber (or any thin cucumber, even Persian), halved lengthwise and sliced 1/4 inch thick, stems removed, skin preserved

Soak the seaweed in hot water for half an hour. Heat a skillet - or preferably a cast iron pan - over medium-high heat. Cook the leek in the (unoiled) pan, turning on occasion to char all sides. Let cool. In a small mixing bowl, combine the salt, garlic, soy cause, vinegar and sesame seeds. Now that your seaweed is ready, drain it in a colander using your hands to wring it... Chop roughly into bite-sized pieces and throw into a medium mixing bowl. Now that your leek has cooled, chop it into - you got it - bite-sized pieces as well. Add the chopped leek and cucumber to the seaweed. Pour the tasty sauce over the vegetables, mixing with your hands to ensure all pieces get coated. Serve at room temperature. Can last 2 to 3 days in the refrigerator (short shelf life, on account of the seaweed).

COMFORTING SOUPS & STEWS

Along with rice, soups and stews are the focal point of the Korean diet. Historically, beef was a rare commodity and was generally consumed only on special occasions. But stews or soups, served piping hot, have emerged as the Korean version of a healthy comfort food.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Stew (or “jjigae”) are cooked quickly, blending a cornucopia of ingredients, whereas a Korean soup (or “tang”) are broth-filled, minimalist, and often cooked for hours – sometimes for several days. That said, don’t fret: the soup proposed in this cooking primer is a quick affair!

Kimchi-Based Tofu Stew ("Kimchi Jjigae")

You know how stews, while comforting due to their warmth and slow-cooked goodness, sometimes disappoint on account of their bland nature? Well, not this stew, no siree. Here we guide you through a slightly simplified version of "kimchi jjigae." Let's start by cooking with mature kimchi (kept in the refrigerator for a few months), frying it up to enhance its sauerkraut-like character, and using "moksal", or neck-level slices of pork... NOTE: "gochujang" is a red, sticky paste of chili, rice and fermented soybean powders... Available at your local Asian-friendly grocery store...



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4 to 5 servings:

1/2 lb “moksal” (neck) pork slices, or pork belly slices

2 cups kimchi, chopped 1 cup onions, chopped 3 cups water

2 tablespoons

“gochugaru” (or powdered chili flakes) 1 tablespoon

“gochujang”

2 green onion stalks (or scallions), cut lengthwise if thick, 1 inch

lengths 1/2 lb tofu, firm, cut into large bite-sized pieces 1/2

teaspoon fish sauce

Fry up the pork slices in a medium pot, over medium heat. Cook just enough: you don't want the meat to get rubbery or dry/hard... Pour out most of the fat, but leave some in the pot for cooking the remainder. Fry the onions and kimchi for up to 10 minutes, until the onions are translucent. Add the water, “gochugaru” or powdered chili flakes and “gochujang.” Bring to a boil, then simmer for 30 minutes. Add the green onion, tofu and fish sauce. Cook for another 10 minutes. Serve immediately with rice on the side.

Chicken Stew (“Dakdori Tang”)

How many ways are there of cooking chicken? Lots... This recipe will provide you with the virtues of comfort as you enjoy its warm, relatively slow-cooking, wholesomeness... while also tickling your taste buds, on account of the added spicy kick. While some versions of this recipe call for sugar to boost the taste factor, we found it healthier and equally sweet by adding carrots instead. Cool evenings are the perfect setting for this chicken stew. Enjoy!



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4 to 6 servings:

1/4 cup soy sauce

2 tablespoons fresh ginger, finely minced

5 cloves(!) garlic, finely minced

1/4 cup “gochujang”

3 tablespoons “gochugaru” (or powdered chili flakes)

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1 chicken, whole, rinsed, patted dry and cut into 6-8 pieces

3 cups water

2 medium potatoes (or more if using baby potatoes), diced

1 cup “moo” radish (or “daikon”), roughly chopped

2 cups carrots, roughly chopped

2 Korean green chilis (or 1-2 jalapeno peppers), halved, pitted, and thinly sliced

1 bunch green onion (or scallions), white parts only, cut into 2 inch long pieces

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the soy sauce, ginger, garlic, “gochujang”, “gochugaru” or chili, and fish sauce. In a medium pot, combine the chicken with the sauce mixture and water.

Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce to a simmer for 20 minutes. Add the potatoes, radish and carrots. Simmer for another 20 minutes, again covered. Add more water if necessary. Add the chilis and onion, cook for another 5-10 minutes, this time uncovered, until the sauce thickens slightly. Serve immediately. (You could enjoy this as leftovers, but there likely will not be any!)

FLAVORFUL ENTREES

One of the more intriguing qualities of Korean meals are how the dishes are served. Traditional Korean meals are something of a mini-feast. Unlike other world cuisines which serve soups, salads, appetizers, entrees, in sequence, Koreans like to serve everything at once!



Photo Credit: Jakub Kapusnak

This said, in keeping with the “primer” aspect of this little book, we have picked a few K-dishes from the plethora of possibilities, simplified and portioned them to fit the Western definition of a main course. From meats to noodles, even pancakes, we have a wonderful little assortment of entrees for you to discover!

LA–Style Korean BBQ (“Kalbi”)

Why LA-style? In the seventies, large numbers of Koreans immigrated to LA. While they were accustomed to making their bbq with beef cuts running along the ribs, at that time they could only get their hands on a German-Jewish cut which runs crosswise, through the bones. Known as “flanken”, it contains 3-4 pieces of bone per piece, and is 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick. But enough with numbers. Prepare to have your taste buds blown away by this K-bbq.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

NOTE: The Asian pear is meant to tenderize the meat. If you don't have it handy, consider replacing it with a couple of kiwis.

Makes 4 to 6 servings:

1 white onion, medium, roughly chopped

1 Asian pear (or regular pear, worst case scenario), pitted, peeled, roughly chopped

2 tablespoons garlic, finely minced

2 teaspoons fresh ginger, finely minced

3/4 cup soy sauce

1/4 cup sugar (preferably dehydrated cane sugar)

2 tablespoons mirin (Japanese condiment similar to sake)

1 teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground

2 tablespoons sesame oil

1/2 cup water

2 1/2 lbs “flanken” cut beef short ribs

Canola or other cooking oil, if frying in a skillet

Rinse the meat cuts thoroughly to make sure all the loose bits of bone are gone. Pat dry. Set aside. In a food processor, chop the onion and Asian pear. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the garlic, ginger, soy sauce, sugar, mirin, black pepper, sesame oil and water. Add the onion and Asian pear. Transfer to a large Ziploc bag. Add the meat cuts to the bag, ensuring all are basking in the marinade... Seal the bag shut. Sit the bag in a bowl or deep dish and refrigerate overnight. If weather and your equipment permit, fire up the bbq! Once nice and hot, arrange the pieces of meat across your grill. Cook 2-3 minutes on one side. Then flip, cooking to the desired level of doneness. Alternatively, heat a skillet over high heat. Coat with a minimum amount of oil. Arrange the meat cuts without crowding them into the skillet (if need be, cook the meat in batches). Serve piping hot, wrapping deboned pieces in leaves of lettuce.

Grilled Beef (“Bulgogi”)

While this recipe is strikingly similar, chemically speaking, to the LA-style Korean bbq described previously, it serves a (slightly) different purpose... For example, you can add this to the “japchae” described next and turn this initially vegetarian noodle dish into an omnivore’s culinary classic. Now, about the meat cut: for best results, go for strips of sirloin. But if you are wanting to save money, consider rump, which is nearly as tender as sirloin but a bit less expensive. Alternatively, you could venture out into the world of less tender pieces of meat. If so, make sure you use plenty of acidic fruit and sugar to tenderize, and marinate at least overnight.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4 to 6 servings:

Same ingredients as for LA-style Korean bbq (“kalbi”), from onion to water... 2 1/2 lbs sirloin or rump cut of beef, cut into 2 inch long pieces, finger width 1 white onion, very thinly sliced (use mandoline) 2 carrots, very thinly sliced (again, mandoline)

Canola or other cooking oil

2-3 stalks of green onion, green parts roughly chopped diagonally

Toasted sesame seeds

Follow the instructions for LA-style Korean bbq (“Kalbi”) for processing the Asian pear, onion, and combining the ingredients for the marinade in a medium mixing bowl. Marinate the beef, onion and carrot in a Ziploc plastic bag for at least a couple of hours, or overnight. Heat a tablespoon or so of cooking oil in a skillet or cast-iron pan over medium high heat. Throw the strips into the pan, paying attention not to include the juices (you want to sear, not steam the meat). Cook in batches if there isn’t enough room for all pieces. Cook for a few minutes, turning the strips once browned. Get rid of the juices in a separate bowl in between batches. When all strips are cooked, return the juices to the pan to reduce. Pour a bit of the reduced juices onto the meat at serving time if it’s looking dry. Decorate with the sesame seeds and green onion. Serve either as part of a sweet potato noodle stir fry (“japchae”) or on its own, along with rice and “banchan” (of course!) Depending on level of doneness, it can last up to a week in the refrigerator.

Sweet Potato Noodle Stir Fry ("Japchae")

Everyone loves noodles... (Seriously, know anyone who doesn't? We don't). So, here's a really colorful noodle dish you will love making, and feasting on. The noodles are really fun: when cooked, they become translucent, like glass (sometimes they are even referred to as such). Well worth hunting down at your local grocery or specialty store. It may sound like too much work, to cook each veggie separately, but it's better to do so, to cook each ingredient to the right level and preserve their individual flavors... For the mushrooms, you can rehydrate dried shiitake or other types, or incorporate fresh ones, depending on availability in your corner of the galaxy.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 4 to 6 servings:

1 lb sweet potato starch noodles (“dang myeon”)

2 tablespoons sesame oil

2 tablespoons soy sauce

A couple tablespoons olive or grapeseed oil

1 white onion, thinly sliced

Kosher salt

2 carrots, medium, cut matchstick-size (use mandolin)

1/2 lb shiitake mushrooms, re-hydrated; or brown mushrooms. In

either case: chopped 2 teaspoons fresh ginger, finely minced

2 bundles of spinach or swiss chard, thinly sliced

3 cloves garlic, finely minced

2 red or orange bell peppers, cleaned, thinly sliced

4 egg yolks, beaten

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground

2 tablespoons sesame oil

2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds

**2-3 stalks of green onion, green parts cut into 2 inch long pieces,
halved lengthwise**

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, throw in the noodles and cook for about 6 minutes. Rinse under cold water and drain. Put into a large mixing bowl (preferably metal or porcelain), toss with the sesame oil and soy sauce. Use fingers, if necessary, to coat all the noodles. Now for the veggies: in a skillet, heat some cooking oil over medium heat. Cook the sliced onion until translucent, about 8 minutes. Season with some salt, add to the noodle mixing bowl. (We will be adopting a similar pattern with each of the vegetables). Increase the heat to medium high. Fry up the carrots for a few minutes, season & transfer to bowl. Cook the mushrooms with the ginger till they lose their moisture. Season & transfer. Fry up the greens and garlic: just soften the greens for 2 minutes, season & transfer (drain off any liquid, as you don't want that in with the noodles). Cook the bell peppers, season & transfer. Lower the heat, cook the egg yolks in a thin layer, till dry. Extract from pan. Slice into ribbons (it helps to roll up the egg first and slice the roll) & transfer. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the soy sauce, pepper, sesame oil and seeds. Mix the vegetables in with the noodles, add the sauce, mix some more. Serve immediately with the green onion sprinkled on top. It can also be served at room temperature. But we prefer it warm versus cold. (The noodles will regain their translucence if you reheat them). Can last up to a week in the refrigerator.

Green Onion Pancake (“Pajeon”)

Christine: This one’s straight from mom! Imagine a serving that is delicious like pancakes and fun like finger food. And yet it’s healthy. Thank the green onion that contains surprising amounts of vitamins A and K... The term “pajeon” is derived from “pa”, meaning green onion, and “jeon”, meaning pretty much anything pan-fried in a flour, water and doughy mixture... Served as finger-friendly wedges with its indispensable dipping sauce at its side, “pajeon” is a guaranteed hit at any potluck. In an ideal world, you would use Chinese chives (which are thicker and tougher than regular chives, yet more delicate than actual green onion). But if you settle on using green onion, by splitting it lengthwise, you should be ok.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 2-3 lunch servings, or 4-6 servings as side dish:

**2 bundles of Chinese chive or green onion (up to a dozen stalks each) 1
teaspoon salt**

1 teaspoon vegetable oil

A few drops sesame oil

3 cups flour (I like to use whole wheat)

1 egg mixed with 3/4 cup water

6 tablespoons soy sauce

A drizzle of sesame oil

**A few drops of vinegar (rice vinegar preferred) Chinese chives or green
onion, finely chopped (optional)**

If using green onion, chop the white parts relatively fine. The green parts should ideally be split lengthwise, then cut into 2-inch lengths. (If using Chinese chives, just cut to length). Mix the onion, salt and oils in a medium mixing bowl. Let sit for 20-30 minutes... In the meantime, combine the soy sauce, sesame oil, vinegar and decorative onion (optional) in a small mixing bowl... Once the onion is ready, gently fold the flour into it. Then add the water/egg mix gradually. Stop adding liquid once you reach a batter texture similar to that of pancakes. Do not over-mix otherwise the flour toughens. Preheat an iron skillet over medium high heat. Coat the skillet generously with vegetable oil. Pour a soup ladle's worth into the skillet and quickly spread evenly, to a thickness of 1/4 inch. Cook for a few minutes on one side, until the bottom of the pancake turns golden brown. Then flip over and cook the other side till golden brown as well, another few minutes. (Not browning? Turn up the heat a bit). Allow to cool on a rack. Repeat if there's any batter left. Cut pancakes into bite-sized wedges. Serve with soy sauce dip and enjoy!

A HEALTHY DESSERT

In the West, punctuating a meal with a sweet addition is commonplace. But desserts from Korea tend to be less sugary, are generally simple and soothing to the stomach. They are generally served with tea and are designed to be visually appealing. They feature nutritious ingredients like beans, rice flour, varied nuts and seeds.



Photo Credit: Madina via Unsplash

Red Bean Porridge (“Padjuk”)

To keep you off of sugar as much as possible, while still offering the option of a nutritious dessert, we bring you “padjuk”: a red bean porridge with rice flour dumplings. Originally a dish to mark Winter Solstice - its signature red color meant to ward off the evil spirits lurking within the longest night of the year, and its egg-shaped rice dumplings for evoking hope and life - “padjuk” can be enjoyed as a snack or dessert on any cool evening. Christine: my mom first introduced me to “padjuk” when I was a teenager. I found it not sweet enough, of course... But given my adult nutrition awareness, the mildness of the porridge combined with its legume goodness leave me feeling guilt-free and happy. NOTE: To enhance flavor, try adding salt. But if you still can’t get used to the lack of sweetness, you can always spike “padjuk” with some maple syrup (see the shot glass in the picture below!) We just won’t tell my mom. You may need to find an Asian-friendly grocery store for the azuki beans and sweet rice flour, but this très Korean dessert is well worth the search.



Photo Credit: Christine Desmarais

Makes 6-8 cereal bowl-sized servings

1 cup dried azuki beans (these look like red kidney beans, but smaller) 6 cups water (twice... see below for details)

1 teaspoon salt

2 cups sweet rice flour

1 cup hot water (just short of a cup, actually)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon sugar (preferably sucanat, i.e. dehydrated cane sugar)

1/4 cup brown, short grain, sweet rice

In a colander, rinse the beans in running water, rubbing them in circles with your fingers. Add the beans and water to a pot, bring to a thorough boil for 10 minutes... Drain, and bring back to a boil (with fresh water and the salt), for 40-60 minutes. The beans need to be easily mashed in between your fingers or when pressed with a fork. Add water and cook longer if necessary. Prepare the rice dumplings: in a medium mixing bowl, combine the rice flour, hot water, salt and sugar. Stir with a wooden spoon. Once cooled, massage with your fingers for a few minutes to get all the ingredients combined. It should not be so wet that you cannot manipulate the dough, nor so dry that nothing seems to stick together... Add water (or flour) as necessary. Knead a little. Roll into a ball, cover in wrap or store in a plastic bag, let rest for 10-20 minutes. Now, back to the beans: once cooked, drain through a sieve (preferably metal), preserving the cooking water. With a spoon, mash the beans against the sides of the sieve over the pot so as to recover the pulp. Have a friend pour a little bit of hot water around the sieve as you mash up

the last bits... Don't be shy to squeeze any leftover juices/pulp out of the skins with your hands prior to discarding them. If the leftover blob of bean skins feels a bit paper-like, you've mashed them up enough. Use a spatula to scrape all of the good pulp off of the bottom of the sieve. Let the pot sit for several minutes, for the pulp and sediments to settle to the bottom. (Otherwise you risk burning the pulp during cooking in the next step). Measure the quantity of liquid you're able to recover off the top of the mashed beans, avoiding the pulp. Carefully pour this liquid into another cooking pot. (A cup of beans boiled with our technique should yield some 2 cups of liquid). Increase the quantity of liquid by adding water to make a total of 3 cups. Bring to a boil. Add the rice. Cook, covered, simmering, for 15 minutes. (The rice helps give the porridge a bit of texture). Now for making the dumplings: retrieve dough from wrap/bag. Roll it into a sausage shape in between your hands. Lay flat, cut into 3/4 inch pieces. Roll these into nice little balls... Once the rice is cooked, pour the pulp mix into the pot, and carefully drop in the rice dumplings. Cook some 10-15 minutes, at a low boil, until the dumplings float to the surface. Ideally, serve nice and hot immediately, re-heated later or even at room temperature if you must. Season with a bit of salt. And maple syrup as mentioned previously, if you're dying for a sugar fix... Can be served with kimchi (savory and sweet, that's right!) Can last a week in the refrigerator.

IN CLOSING...

If Atkins hasn't worked for you... You've felt overly bound by your Paleo regime... Or you've encountered difficulties following a Keto diet... Perhaps it's time to consider a balanced, healthy Korean diet.

Consider this: Korea boasts an obesity rate of 10 percent, while the rate in the U.S. is 34 percent. The typical American diet is high in sugar, fat and top-heavy with foods that are processed. A 2010 Dietary Guideline notes that the average American consumes most of his or her calories via grain-based desserts, including cookies, cakes and doughnuts. Americans also consume an abundance of fast foods such as pizzas, tacos and burgers. Add to it an obsession with sodas, energy and sports drinks and it's easy to understand why Americans are bursting at their seams.

Korean cuisine is a healthy, tasty avenue for people who have been struggling to lose weight on a Western diet to effectively shed their unwanted pounds. Unlike a typical American menu, the Korean diet is high in carbs and low in fat. If you eat more like a Korean, you will be replacing processed carbs and high-fat foods with rice, vegetables and a light touch of meat or fish.



Christine enjoying her first Korean meals in Korea (ever!) with her mom as her culinary and linguistic guide...

The K-diet is a healthy alternative worthy of serious consideration. We hope you enjoy cooking and eating thanks to this primer. This said, if you wish to dive deeper into K-cuisine, may we recommend “Korean Home Cooking” by Sohui Kim, and “Little Hawaiian Korean Kitchen Cookbook” by Joan Namkoong.