

Today's Dietitian

[Science Meets Cooking at Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives — One RD's Positive Experience](#)

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By Jennifer C. Shrodes, RD, LD

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A collaboration between The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in St. Helena, Calif., and Harvard Medical School, Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives is an annual gathering of physicians, dietitians, nurses, hospital and insurance executives, healthcare foodservice directors, and chefs. What it promises, according to its website, is a discussion of the state of science of diet and nutrition with the purpose of “transforming attendees into ambassadors for and role models of healthy nutritional strategic change.”

During the opening session of this year's Healthy Kitchens, Healthy Lives: Caring for Our Patients and Ourselves, attendees were encouraged to pace themselves because, over the course of the four-day conference, 300 recipes would be available for sampling. This came as great news to me; as a dietitian who loves to cook, I was looking for more ideas on how to incorporate real food (not food models) and cooking into my practice.

During the four days at the CIA, there were many lecture-style presentations. I learned about trends in obesity, nutrition's role in helping prevent cancer, and the benefits of adopting a plant-based diet. In sessions addressing childhood obesity, experts presented success stories of patients who eat in moderation and exercise regularly. Some offbeat session topics included the effects of dark chocolate and alcohol on health. Attendees also learned about sustainability of the U.S. food system. Between lectures, chefs took to the demo kitchen to prepare delicious and nutritious food with ease. The lectures were interesting, but I was fascinated by the practical application of food.

The first workshop I attended was “Spices, Herbs and Aromatics,” led by Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, the CIA's program director for strategic initiatives, and Suvir Saran, a chef, consultant, and author. Participants learned techniques such as how and when to add spices to dishes to maximize taste. Before starting a dish, the presenters toasted whole spices such as cumin and curry leaves in a skillet to bring out their natural oils. Using a mortar and pestle, they then crushed the toasted spices to extract their flavor and added them to the dishes either during or after the cooking process, depending on the desired outcome.

As the aroma of each spice rose from the kitchen and reached my seat in the auditorium, I realized that healthful food must appeal to us before we taste it or even see it. Saran spoke about the importance of simplifying cooking and paying attention to both our health and our children's health. Myrdal Miller made the critical connections between science and food—information I crave as a nutrition educator.

Eager for new breakfast ideas, I attended the session “Memorable Starts: Building a Better Breakfast,” also presented by an RD-chef team: Connie Guttersen, RD, PhD, and Mark Furstenberg. The presenters shared some useful breakfast tips that RDs can present to clients as well as use themselves: Prepare quiche crust using chickpea flour, olive oil, and yogurt; think outside the cereal box and try barley and wheat berries; and bake eggs with chunky vegetable sauce using vegetables from the previous night's dinner.

By the end of the presentation, Furstenberg had attendees vowing to eat homemade breakfast every day. Guttersen offered evidence-based information on why people who eat breakfast feel better both emotionally and physically. The cited research is invaluable and will come in handy when I discuss the importance of eating breakfast with my clients.

On the final day of the conference, I participated in a kitchen workshop in which I, along with 20 other attendees, joined in the cooking. During this workshop, “Cooking With Fruit,” led by chef instructor Rebecca Peizer, attendees learned how to dice and julienne with confidence and purpose.

The instructor assigned my small group of three, including a physician and an architect, to prepare grilled pineapple salsa. Wearing protective food handler gloves and armed with a sharp paring knife, I cut and seeded a Serrano chili, creating a fine mince in record time. I found sharp knives key to making fruit preparation a joy rather than a messy chore.

By the end of the workshop, my fellow participants and I had successfully assembled 10 fruit recipes, including smoothies, salads, salsa, and soup. Best of all, I am now able to extract every bit of juicy flesh from a ripe mango.

As the conference drew to an end, attendees were welcomed to microphones to share their thoughts on the days' events. Standing before hundreds of attendees, one person revealed that in her 20 years of practice, this was the only conference she had ever attended to the end and that she had already registered for the 2012 show.

As for me, I got what I came for: to learn how to incorporate real food and cooking into my practice.