

EAT BEAT



Fried Fiesta

Amber Dias finds out why deep-fried delicacies are a healthier option in the monsoon.





With the monsoon downpour comes the urge to cosy up with friends and family and dig into a sizzling plate of *pakodas*, *bhajiyas*, roasted corn and more. This, however, is often followed by the nagging voice in your head that reminds you about how unhealthy fried food is. But that is not necessarily true. Deep-fried munchies have their advantages too. Let's take a closer look.

DEEP-FRIED DELIGHTS

Deep-frying essentially is a cooking method that involves submerging food in fat or oil at a high temperature. Apart from cooking food quickly, deep-frying seals in flavour, tenderness and moisture of the food. But it's not just great taste that makes deep-fried food appealing.

Nutritionist and fitness consultant Munmun Ganeriwal explains, "Eating food according to the season has always been a cornerstone of ancient Indian philosophy. Having deep-fried goodies during the monsoon is healthier than having them in any other season. There is a reason why we want to have *bhajiyas* or *pakodas* when it rains. Our body's immunity is low during this season and the chances of infections, cold and flu are high. Having something as calorie and nutrient dense as deep-fried food increases the body's immunity and defends it from all illnesses."

TECHNIQUE TRIUMPHS

Some research reveals that the absorption of oil is less in deep-frying as compared to shallow frying. However, it is all a matter of technique. When deep-frying food, it is essential to heat the oil to the right temperature and maintain it that way, so only the surface is exposed to the oil and a delicious crust forms while the inside is cooked just right. This temperature differs depending on the smoking point of the oil you are using. If the temperature is too low, the crust forms slowly, thereby allowing the food to absorb more fat. And if the temperature is too high, the surface burns quickly, leaving the inside undercooked.



FRIED FOOD... THE HEALTHY WAY

- Fried food is healthier provided you choose good quality oil.
- Make your deep-fried goodies at home.
- Use fresh and healthy ingredients.
- Cut the food into equal proportions to ensure that they fry at the same rate.
- Use a cooking thermometer to check the temperature of the oil, if possible.
- Fry food in small batches.
- Briefly drain the excess oil on absorbent paper before serving.
- Eat food fresh and hot. If not being consumed right away, place in an oven heated to approximately 94°C to keep it crisp.
- Do not reuse oil that you are frying in. Reusing oil oxidises the fat, forming free radicals and compounds which are harmful for one's health.

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OIL MATTERS

Choosing the right oil is also essential to extracting the best out of your deep-fried munchies. Oils with a high smoke point are the best option as deep-frying requires pre-heating the oil at a high temperature.

Munmun avers, "One should use filtered oils from traditional oilseeds like mustard, coconut, sesame and groundnut to deep-fry food. Unlike refined oil, the oilseeds are crushed under lower temperature to make cold pressed or filtered oils. Hence, they retain their nutrients, colour, aroma and flavour. Unlike industrial refining, this process also does not use any solvents or chemicals."

She adds, "In India, diverse cultures eat differently and the type of oil fits beautifully into the food landscape of





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that region. Largely depending on where you come from, one should choose amongst the different nut-based oils. For instance, a Bengali should fry his fish in mustard oil, while if you come from Maharashtra or Gujarat, filtered groundnut oil would be your best choice.”

CRISPY CREATIONS

The golden crispy crust that surrounds your meat or veggie is one of the best parts of digging into fried food. In order for this crust to form, a starchy barrier between the oil and food is required. When the starch hits the

hot oil, it dries, forming a crisp shell that protects the food inside, sealing in the flavour and moisture.

Certain food like potatoes contain starch naturally and do not require an additional coating. However, food like meats and fish require a coating like egg and breadcrumbs, or a batter. Batters are preferred for delicate food that tends to fall apart while being cooked, like fish, for example. However, batters don't allow for much evaporation and food tends to get soggy if not consumed immediately. On the other hand, breadcrumbs stay crisp for a longer duration. But when it comes to getting the perfect coating, you are free to experiment with a variety of flavours and use what works best for you.

Fried food is definitely a fab way to beat the monsoon blues. However, it is best to indulge in moderation as too much of anything will eventually weigh down on your health.