

Chef's top

These tasty tricks made cooking star Virginia Willis 65 lbs leaner—and can help you drop 10 lbs a week

Ever feel like there are mountains of yum blocking your path to your happy weight? Take heart: “I’m living proof you can indulge in delicious food while still dropping those extra pounds, getting healthy and becoming stronger,” insists Virginia Willis, former kitchen director for Bobby Flay and Martha Stewart and author of the get-lean guide *Fresh Start*. “If a stress-eating, postmenopausal, Southern chef can lose 65 pounds, then anybody can!” In fact, women who’ve sampled strategies Virginia shares here have shed up to 10 pounds a week

Raised in a food-loving Georgia family, Virginia then went to culinary school in France. For years, her go-to ingredients were “butter, butter, butter and maybe a little cream,” she says with a laugh. She was fond of big helpings, but it had little to do with physical hunger. “I ate for emotional reasons—because I was happy, sad, anxious, bored. Other times, it was just because what I was cooking tasted so good. Basically, I love to eat!”

Her career took off, and she didn’t worry much about her diet until her 40s, when early menopause hit. As her weight soared to

232 pounds, “I felt lousy,” recalls Virginia, who eventually tried tracking portions. The tactic worked at first. But when life got stressful, she abandoned her efforts and regained more than 20 pounds. Years ticked by. “I wasn’t happy with how I moved, how I looked or how I felt,” she says. Then one day, she aggravated an old back injury—and pandemic restrictions meant no surgery or physical therapy. Shaken and in pain, “I went to my computer, printed a list of foods good for back health and stuck it on my fridge.” From there, Virginia began to take baby steps that changed everything...

Eating like Chef Willis is the

To melt fat like Virginia, start by using a free app, like the one at MyFitnessPal.com, to keep portions healthy. Then experiment with the recipes Virginia shares here, or just use them as inspiration to whip up your own creations with unprocessed ingredients. Tips to dial down appetite as you savor healthy meals: Aim for one serving of protein and two or more servings of vegetables/fruit per sitting, sip lots of water and homemade broth and use herbs and spices very liberally. Find more tips and ideas in *Fresh Start*, at VirginiaWillis.com or by following @VirginiaWillis on Instagram.



BREAKFAST

1 serving of whole-grain cereal, such as Uncle Sam or Cheerios, with 1 serving of milk or yogurt, 2 servings of any fruit and a sprinkle of nuts and/or seeds.



BEFORE

As always, get your doctor's okay to try any new dietary strategy.

weight-loss tips

GET-SLIM SECRETS

Virginia continued educating herself, building this arsenal of tricks to keep her taste buds happy as excess fat disappeared.

• Double-duty groceries

Virginia's new staples came from the list on her fridge, including omega-3-rich fish, plant protein from beans and seeds, antioxidant-rich produce, olive oil and nuts. "It kept me focused on what's good *and* good for me," says the chef, who still eats carbs but now chooses veggies over starchy sides.

The fat-fighting advantage: A Stanford study found that folks who choose the least processed foods lose most on any type of diet—up to 400% more than those who favor processed fare. "When you eat whole foods, you feel content after far fewer calories," notes Boston University's Caroline Apovian, M.D. Nutrients in whole foods also soothe inflammation linked to pain and suppressed

thyroid function. Plus, studies show they steady blood sugar and slash appetite by a whopping 494 calories a day.

• Bacon and breadcrumbs

Food lovers crave more than plain salmon and broccoli, right? "Absolutely!" says Virginia, who gives fish and chicken a crunchy crumb coating and punches up dishes with ingredients like bacon, blue cheese, hot peppers and maple syrup. "Food loaded with texture and flavor is more satisfying, so you naturally eat less," she insists.

Virginia also uses an app to track her portions. "It's very grounding to measure everything," says the chef, who doles out things like peanut butter and ice cream with a 1 Tbs. cookie-dough scoop. "It's a

guardrail to keep me on track." Scientists agree: When we track, we double weight-loss success!

• Broth breaks

Virginia read that staying super-hydrated is healing, so in addition to lots of water, "I started making broth using veggie scraps. It became my go-to snack," she says (recipe below). "It's delicious, boosts my energy and is surprisingly filling!" European studies show a hydrating glass of water or mug of broth revs metabolism by up to 30% and stimulates a stop-eating region of the brain.

• Better cookies

Sometimes you just want dessert. "Instead of depriving myself, I make mine with less sugar and healthier ingredients," says Virginia. "Two of my cookies (recipe below) and fruit after supper is a perfect ending to the

day. I never find myself prowling the cabinets later in the evening."

• Stress-eating relief

"When I started, I thought walking would help rehab my back, so I went as far as my body would allow," Virginia says. Turns out, walking fights inflammation by lowering blood sugar and stress hormones. "Even when I could barely get around the block, it helped my stress." Each day, she walked farther and ate better. "One day, I went up stairs with no pain at all, and it hit me: *My body is healing.*" It was shrinking too. All told, Virginia shed 65 pounds. Her back is pain-free. "I just got my blood work checked. At age 55, it's better than it was 20 years ago." Her best advice: "Progress is progress no matter how small. Just start—you'll be amazed by where you end up!" **WW**

Yes!
Whole grains are packed with so many nutrients, just swapping in three servings a day can lower blood pressure by 88%, per a Tufts University study

easy, scrumptious way to lose big!



LUNCH

Turkey or leftover meat/fish with 1 Tbs. of light cream cheese on a healthy everything bagel (like Dave's Killer Bread brand); enjoy with large side salad.



SNACK

Simmer 8 cups of veggie scraps, 1 halved onion, 1 Tbs. of black peppercorns, 3 cloves of garlic, ginger or turmeric and enough water to cover for 30 minutes. Strain.



DINNER

Mix 1 cup of panko breadcrumbs, 1 tsp. of chopped garlic, a pinch of Creole seasoning, salt and pepper; use as coating in any oven-fried chicken/fish dish.



Peanut butter yum!

Chef Willis' treats have all the delish, but half the sugar of most recipes

- 1 cup crunchy peanut butter
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 egg

Heat oven to 350°F. Combine all ingredients. Roll into 24 balls. Place 2" apart on a lined sheet; flatten each with a fork. Bake until browned and set, about 10 minutes. Set sheet on a rack to cool. Enjoy with fruit. Serves 12

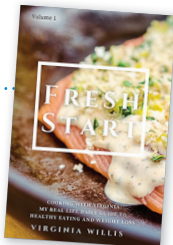
Turn for more delicious recipes



Delicious ways to slim

Southern chef Virginia Willis is sharing some favorite recipes that helped her drop 65 pounds “and keep it off for a year and half!” she says proudly. Worried you don’t have enough time or the cooking skills to make them? She promises the dishes are super-easy to prepare. “I like food that’s wholesome and simple,” she says. “Even beginners and busy women can use my recipes to make really satisfying food. Bon appétit, y’all!”

Find more in the
get-lean guide
Fresh Start or at
VirginiaWillis.com



Turkey Meatloaf *Perfect for supper and leftovers that make great sandwiches*

- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 lb. ground turkey
- 1 large egg, beaten
- ¼ cup low-sodium ketchup
- 1 tsp. low-sodium Worcestershire sauce

In cooking spray, sauté onion until clear, 3 minutes. Add garlic until fragrant, 45 seconds. Let cool slightly. In bowl, mix veggies, turkey, egg and salt and pepper to taste. On lined sheet, form loaf. Mix ketchup and Worcestershire; brush on meat. Bake at 400°F until meat thermometer registers 165°F, 30–45 minutes, depending on thickness. Serves 4



Charred Cauliflower Tacos

“Taking the time to char cauliflower is worth it,” says Chef Willis. “It brings out so much flavor with zero added calories!”



- 2 cups chopped cauliflower
- 2 tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 8 corn tortillas or any healthy tortillas, warmed

Optional toppings:
radish, onion, tomato, sliced peppers, cilantro, lime juice, light sour cream

Heat a large cast iron skillet over medium heat. Add cauliflower. Cook, stirring occasionally, until darkly charred and tender, about 20 minutes. Add spices and season with salt and pepper, stirring until the cauliflower is well-coated. Spoon into tortillas and pile on any desired toppings.
Makes 8 tacos

Buffalo Ranch Dip

“Blue cheese packs so much punch, no one will notice the reduced-fat cheddar,” the chef promises



- ½ cup light cream cheese
- ½ cup 0% milkfat Icelandic or Greek yogurt
- ½ cup reduced-fat cheddar
- ¼ cup hot sauce
- 4 Tbs. blue cheese crumbles, divided
- 2½ cups shredded cooked chicken breast
- 2 green onions, chopped, divided

Combine cream cheese, yogurt, cheddar, hot sauce and 2 Tbs. blue cheese. Fold in chicken and half the green onions. Spoon into a baking dish and top with remaining blue cheese and green onion. Bake at 350°F until hot and bubbly, about 15 minutes. Enjoy with sliced veggies.
Makes 4 cups