

The Swedish Diet

Choose your portions wisely.

BY TANJA DJELEVIC, MA



Coming to America from a small town in the south of Kristianstad, Sweden, was an eye-opening experience for me as a health and fitness specialist—I realized everything here is big! It was especially a shock to see how Americans eat. Although I encountered the occasional person on some crazy diet based on malnourishment, the biggest surprise to me was that even fit people who exercised daily had no clue about how to eat properly.

As part of my job, I teach people how to eat a balanced diet—based on good carbohydrates, lean proteins, good oils and fats, and a sufficient amount of vitamins and minerals—that they can maintain over time. Personal trainers can guide clients on how to diet for a fixed period of time, but most importantly, trainers can give individuals the tools to live better, be more energized and healthy and connect with their bodies. The goal of the client and the trainer should be a stabilized weight curve and to remain free of illness and discomfort. Since the word “diet” may be disagreeable, I have introduced the “Swedish way of eating,” also called “Go Swedish,” in an effort to share a beneficial lifestyle with my clients.

A photograph of Jennifer Love Hewitt with long, dark, wavy hair and bangs, wearing a white lace dress. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

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EAT A LITTLE, A LOT

In Sweden, people eat up to four or five meals per day. Following the European style of eating, portion sizes are commonly small, with no meal exceeding 400 calories. Restaurants focus much more on presentation and taste rather than food portions.

In between the main meals, Swedes enjoy "fika," a traditional coffee break, or "mellanmal," a nutritious snack. Snack breaks are opportunities to socialize or gather with the family as well as prevent overeating during the main meal. A typical mellanmal might consist of a dense, high-fiber pumpernickel sandwich with smoked lox, or a bowl of "filmjolk," similar to "kefir" or yogurt, mixed with blueberries and muesli. Sometimes they choose to snack on apples, oranges, clementines, bloodoranges or a medley of seasonal berries.

ANCIENT NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE

Swedes traditionally eat grains early in the day. Oatmeal, a mainstay of the Swedish diet since the time of the Vikings, is the number one Swedish breakfast. In fact, one of the world's best cross-country skiers, Gunde Swann, a Swede, is even pictured on oatmeal containers. Other carb sources include potatoes and root vegetables such as white celery and beets. Potatoes are often eaten cold, which changes the glycemic index from high to medium-low.

Swedish traditional foods are also healthier because they carry lots of antioxidants, fish oils and unsaturated fats. Fruits such as blueberries, lingonberries (a red sister to blueberries) and rosehips are common dietary staples. At Swedish schools, kids eat rosehip soup as a snack and hot blueberry soup with a whole grain, unsweetened cracker called "skorpa" on cold winter mornings. Other soups such as spinach, kale and cauliflower are eaten before a meal to diminish hunger. A significant source of protein in the Swedish diet comes from fish such as salmon, cod and herring. These contain the healthy oils omega-3 and -6.

Besides eating a natural balance of nutritious foods, Swedes stay lean and healthy by consuming smaller portion sizes and avoiding sweets and high-calorie snacks. Adopting the Swedish way of eating will help people improve their American dietary habits.

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A typical Swedish menu for a day—

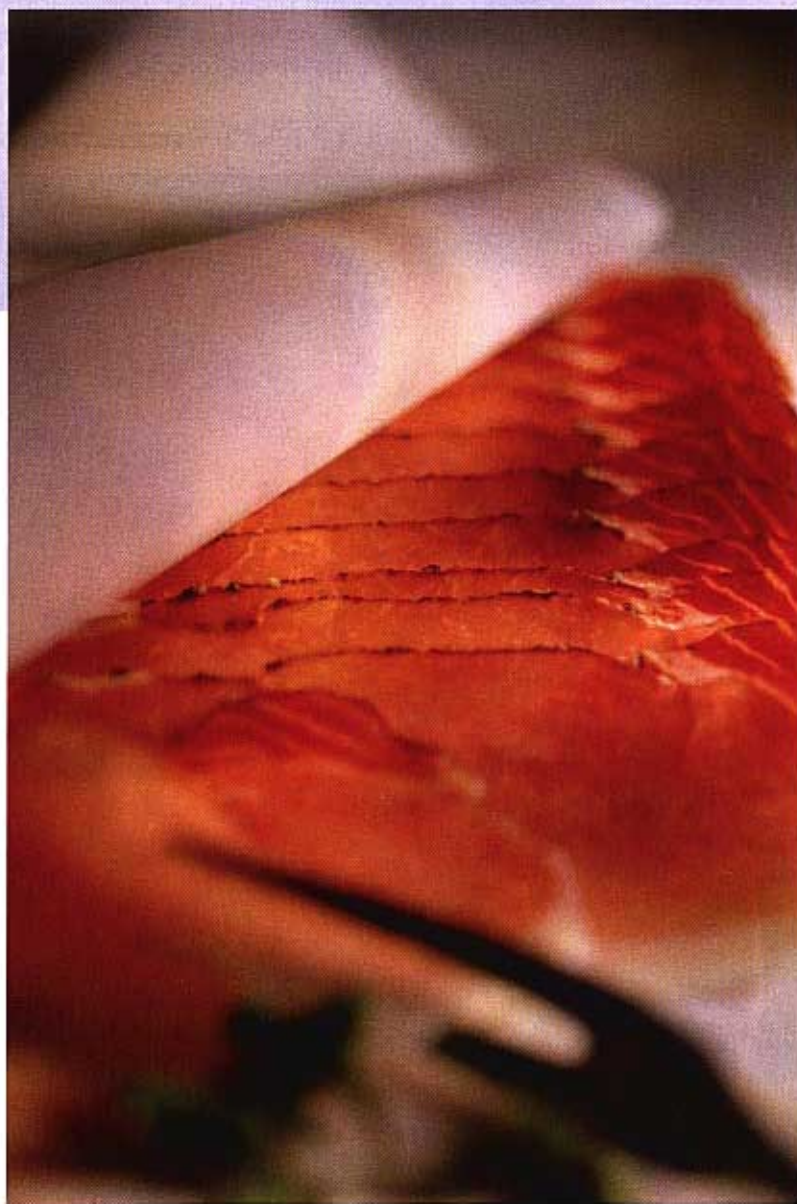
Breakfast: Oatmeal, blueberries, whole almonds, skim milk; 350-400 calories

Snack: Cold or warm semisweet blueberry or rosehip soup; 200 calories

Lunch: Cold egg and potato salad with greens and vegetables; 350-400 calories

Snack: Pumpernickel sandwich with grav lax (raw salmon marinated in salt and other spices); 200 calories

Dinner: Poached cod, egg sauce, root vegetable medley (grated celery, carrot and cabbage with lingonberry sauce). Two slices of Swedish whole grain Wasa crisp bread; 350-400 calories



Blueberry Soup

Popular in Scandinavian countries, particularly before alpine sports events because it's hot and filling, this recipe for blueberry soup will add a new dimension to your snack menu options. With all we hear about the benefits of antioxidants, it's a great way to get more good stuff into your diet.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups frozen blueberries
- 3 cups water
- 5 tablespoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- pinch of salt
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- low fat vanilla yogurt or granola for topping

Combine the first eight ingredients in a saucepan over a medium-high heat, stirring well. Bring the soup to a gentle boil. Reduce and simmer about 5 minutes until the blueberries are tender.

Gently mash some of the berries with a potato masher and serve topped with yogurt and granola (Grape-Nuts® cereal gives a nice crunch). For a slightly sweeter version, use orange juice in place of all or part of the 3 cups of water.

Courtesy of Michelle Mitchell at www.scribbit.blogspot.com/2007/02/blueberry-soup.html.



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