

PRESSURE-COOKING

By The Writers Group

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pressure-cooking is an excellent way to cook vegetables, meats, grains and beans. It is extremely fast, cleanup is easy, and the food is of excellent quality.

Pressure cookers have a tight-fitting lid and a rubber seal between the lid and the pot. One puts a little water in the cooker, and brings it to a boil. If one continues to apply heat, the pressure inside the pot rises, and this forms super-heated steam - or steam at a higher temperature.

Very fast cooking. The combination of higher pressure and higher temperature cooks the food 3 to 5 times faster than steaming or boiling the food. Yet pressure cooking does much less damage to food than other fast or high-temperature methods of cooking.

Easy cleaning. The super-heated steam in a pressure cooker cuts the grease and makes cleanup much easier.

More yang food. The added pressure causes the food to become more yang, which is a great advantage. For more on this topic, read Yin And Yang Healing on this site.

Drawbacks. Be sure to release the pressure in the pressure cooker as soon as the timer indicates that cooking time is over. Otherwise, you can overcook food.

Some people find the high pressure more scary, at first. It takes a little time to become comfortable with a pressure cooker.

TYPES OF PRESSURE COOKERS

The two types of pressure cookers are 1) those that sit on the stove top, and 2) plug-in electric units.

Size. Pressure cookers come in 4, 6, 8 and 10-quart sizes. For one or two people, a 4-quart size is excellent. If you are feeding more people, you may prefer a larger unit.

Materials. Pressure cookers are made of either stainless steel or aluminum. I prefer stainless steel. It is stronger, longer lasting, and does not contaminate the food, as can occur with aluminum.

Brands. Common stove-top brands include Presto, T-Fal and Fagor.

Among the plug-in electric cookers, Instant Pot is a favorite, although they cost about \$150.00 or more. I would avoid brands that have a bin inside that is coated with Teflon. This may outgas into your food, and is not needed.

Cost. A Presto 4-quart stainless steel pressure cooker costs about \$40.00 US Dollars. The electric cookers cost \$100.00 USD or more.

Other issues:

1. Weight. Stove-top pressure cookers, especially those made of stainless steel, are somewhat heavy for washing and moving around.

The plug-in ones have a light-weight interior cooking bin, which is all you need to clean. The main unit just sits on the counter and doesn't need cleaning. This is an advantage of the plug-in cookers.

2. Pressure-release lever. Some brands have a pressure-release lever. This is handy. If your cooker does not have one, you must tilt the weight on the top of the cooker to release the pressure. Never remove the weight while there is pressure in the cooker. This would spew steam and food all over your ceiling!

II. COOKING WITH A PRESSURE COOKER

1. To begin, read the instructions that come with your pressure cooker.

2. Preparation. Put about 1/4-1/2 inch of water in the bottom of the pressure cooker. Ideally, use spring water or carbon-only filtered tap water so you can drink it later.

Then put your food into the cooker. You can mix several vegetables, and you can mix meat in with the vegetables. Cooking grains take longer, so grain is best cooked separately. See below for cooking times.

BASIC PROCEDURE WITH A STOVE-TOP PRESSURE COOKER

Turn on the stove to High heat. Close the cover of the pressure cooker. Within several minutes, the top of the pressure cooker will begin to make a hissing sound and vibrate.

Now turn down the stove to about one-third heat. You will have to experiment to see how much heat you need with your stove to keep the top of the cooker vibrating just a little.

Also, set the timer at this time. For most vegetables and thin meat, 5-8 minutes is about right. If you are at a higher altitude, the time will be a little less. When the timer rings, take the cooker off the hot burner.

RELEASING THE PRESSURE: One must release the pressure quickly when the cooking time is over. Plug-in units and some stove-top pressure cookers come with a button or lever to do this.

If your pressure cooker does not have this, then you must tilt the little weight that is on the

top of the pressure cooker. This is a bit scary, but is safe if you are careful with it. To keep the steam from going everywhere, I place a coffee mug over the weight after I have tilted the weight to release the pressure.

It will take about 20-30 seconds for the pressure to release. Then open the pressure cooker and the food is ready.

WARNING: Never remove the weight on the top of the cooker while the pot has pressure! If you do, it will spew steam all over your ceiling.

COOKING PROCEDURE WITH A PLUG-IN ELECTRIC PRESSURE COOKER

Follow the instructions that come with the machine. Usually, you do not need to turn down the cooking heat when the cooker reaches its operating pressure.

Also, the electric units have an automatic shutoff switch, so you usually will not need to turn off the unit when the time is up. Plug-in units also usually have a separate lever that releases the steam quickly.

III. COOKING TIMES AND RECIPES

The cooking time with a pressure cooker is more important than if one is steaming or baking, for example, because the food cooks very fast. Cooking time depends, in part, upon your altitude.

Our favorite vegetables are red cabbage, all onions – red, yellow, white, green, large, small and shallots, carrots, cauliflower, green beans, rutabaga, Brussels sprouts and broccolini or brocollete. Rutabaga needs to be cut into very thin slices to cook in this short time. However, it is delicious cooked this way, and loses its somewhat disagreeable taste.

Rinse your vegetables and cut them into chunks. Cooking them until they are soft will take 5 to 7 minutes. It is best to release the pressure as soon as the timer rings. Otherwise, the vegetables or other food will continue to cook until the pressure goes out of the cooker.

You can also cook most other vegetables in this short amount of time.

COOKING MEAT

The procedure is similar to cooking vegetables. First put about ¼" of water in the bottom of the cooker, and then add the meat.

You can cook meats with vegetables at the same time. Cutting the meat into 1.5 inch chunks or into slices that are less than about 1.5 inches in thickness will speed up cooking to between 5 and 8 minutes.

Otherwise, some meat such as chicken legs, lamb and certainly larger pieces of meat or a whole chicken, for example, will take longer.

Chicken thigh (skinless and boneless) – 5-8 minutes.

Whole chicken leg – 10 minutes, or 5-8 minutes if you place a few deep cuts in the chicken leg.

Turkey – cooking takes a little more time than chicken because legs and thighs are larger. The exact time will depend also on whether you cut it up before cooking.

Lamb chop – 7 minutes, or about 5 minutes if you put a few cuts in it.

Other lamb – depends on the thickness of the cut of meat, and if you cut it up before placing it in the pressure cooker.

COOKING GRAINS AND CEREALS

The main grain food I suggest is blue corn chips or blue corn tortillas if you can find them. Eat other grain foods sparingly, perhaps twice a week.

Cooking grains and cereals is a little more work than cooking vegetables and meats because you need to add the right amount of water. In most cases, it is about twice as much water as grain.

For example, a portion of grain may require about 1 cup of water and ½ cup of millet, amaranth, oats, quinoa or rice.

Some grains and cereals cook faster than others:

Millet – 7-10 minutes. Millet comes out a little more chewy, but very good.

Amaranth – 10-12 minutes.

Rice and wild rice – 25-35 minutes.

Oats – 7-10 minutes (less for oat flakes).

Quinoa – 6-10 minutes.

COOKING LEGUMES

Pressure cookers are excellent for cooking all types of dried beans, lentils, split peas and other dried legumes. However, I do not recommend eating these foods more than twice per week because they are quite yin and low in etheric energy.

The cooking time varies with the size and shape of the bean. A larger bean such as pinto beans or kidney beans will usually take about 20-30 minutes.

Smaller beans and lentils will cook in 10-20 minutes. You may need to experiment to find the exact time for each legume.