

LOVING Spoonfuls



Hogen sees to it that the egg foo yong isn't fatty and the falafel is quick-fried.



In the kitchen, Hogen is a magician with ingredients; behind the scenes, top right, she practices her menu juggling.



THE RECIPES

Germolata Marinated Mahimahi With Ginger/Cilantro/Soy Vinaigrette (Serves 6)

4 T. minced garlic
2 T. grated lemon zest
4 T. minced Italian parsley
8 T. fresh mint, chopped
½ c. sauvignon blanc or Japanese rice wine
6 5-oz fillets of mahimahi
Vinaigrette (see recipe below)

Place the first five ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Place the fish fillets in a glass dish, and pour the marinade over them. Set in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Meanwhile, prepare the vinaigrette. Place fillets in a shallow pan, brush with marinade, and broil for 6 to 8 minutes. Turn fillets over, brush again, and cook another 6 minutes. Place on plates and spoon 2 T. of vinaigrette over each and serve with quinoa (recipe follows).

Calories per serving: 252
Fat grams per serving: 12.3

Vinaigrette

(Makes approximately the amount necessary for 6 servings.)

¼ c. lime juice
¼ c. light soy sauce
1½ T. freshly grated ginger
1 T. minced garlic
¼ tsp. cayenne
1½ tsp. freshly chopped cilantro
1 T. sesame oil
¼ c. peanut oil

Place all ingredients except oils into a bowl. Whisk vigorously, adding oils until vinaigrette emulsifies. Taste (continued on page 180)

A San Francisco chef blends sound nutrition and strong emotion into her super-healthy comfort-food recipes

QUICK—WHAT'S THE ULTIMATE COMFORT FOOD? Meat loaf? Mashed potatoes? Apple pie? In Barr Hogen's world, there's more than one answer to that. About 681 answers, to be exact.

Hogen, a 32-year-old chef, is supervisor of special meals at Project Open Hand, a San Francisco nonprofit organization that delivers 2,000 free hot suppers a day to people with HIV. In her kitchen, "the daily specials" aren't dishes, but people—about 700 clients who phone in each morning with 21 different dietary requirements, from Asian to vegan to no-wheat-dairy-or-salt. Hogen, a Brooke Shields look-alike with ballerina bearing and a lightning-quick smile, makes sure that men, women and children who don't always feel well enough to cook or eat get the nutrients they need.

"These meals have to be appealing," she says; "there's such an emotional attachment to food." To provide a strengthening diet emotionally and nutritionally, Hogen says, her menus "often wind up going back to what people's mothers used to make." In multicultural San Francisco, the choices might include anything from silky egg foo yong to falafel bathed in tahini sauce to savory *albondigas* (Mexican-style meatballs). The crucial common denominator is sound nutrition: Each meal has to be packed with protein, rich in complex carbohydrates and ultralow in fat. Fat is a particular menace, Hogen explains, because "it blocks

absorption of nutrients and is very difficult to digest."

Accordingly, Hogen prepares *albondigas* with lean turkey breast and rice instead of the traditional ground beef. The falafel, a blend of chickpeas and spices, is not deep-fried, but quick-fried in canola oil, blotted, and baked for half an hour. The tofu in the egg foo yong (carrots, shiitakes, mung bean sprouts, napa cabbage, oyster sauce, garlic, ginger, cornstarch and eggs) is a "light" style sold in health food stores. "People don't realize that tofu is 55 percent fat," Hogen points out. "After all, soybeans contain oil." What makes nutritional sense for people with HIV is exactly "what all people should be doing," Hogen says. "Eat several smaller meals a day, exercise, reduce your stress." And the ideal meal is the same whether you're sick or well: simple and satisfying, and hold the nutritional guilt.

That's a tall order for a generation of careless eaters who grew up on canned food and graduated to fast food when they left home. But whether you're cooking for two or 2,000, good meals "don't have to be boring," Hogen insists. She fills some dietary requests based more on taste than health: Like anyone else, she says, HIV patients are "entitled to get what they want."

Hogen never envisioned herself as an activist; cooking, not politics, has been her calling. In the heat of her bustling kitchen, as meals go into their labeled containers on the assembly line, Hogen whips up a cinnamon-spiked yellow-split-pea-and-millet sauté for the vegans, discussing such fine points as curry versus garam masala (the spice blend we call curry is named after the *kari* leaf).

The real sleight-of-hand is deciding who gets what. In fact, Hogen's way of matching the seven-

odd menu choices with today's computerized stack of special requests is like a riff on that half-double-decaf scene in Steve Martin's *L.A. Story*.

"Let's see, bland-no-bean-no-dairy gets regular-no-dairy, diabetic-no-dairy is regular with rice, diabetic-no-fish is regular diabetic...." GI-no-poultry momentarily has her stumped, until she realizes, "Hey! He can have the regular GI meal."

The regular is a New England boiled dinner with corned beef and mild horseradish sauce. It's not ethnically correct. But ethnic isn't always objective—or even, as Hogen is learning, aesthetic. There was that time she tried to pretty up some black-eyed peas by adding greens and tomatoes, only to have an African American staffer reprimand her: "Black-eyed peas aren't supposed to be pretty."

Then there was the time when Hogen was distributing cookies at a Christmas fund-raiser. She was approached by the "diabetic-bland-no-gluten-vegan" she'd been cooking for all year. "He said, 'My name's Geraldo, and I'd like to do something for you for a change.'" In fact, he already had done something wonderful, simply by "looking great."

That was real progress, given the tragic reason for her job. "At first," she says, "counting all the specials, I'd get very depressed when I'd see a drop in the numbers. Then I realized that sometimes it meant people had gone on to the regular menu—they got better!" She now tries to see the measuring cup as half full. "It helps to remember that HIV is an immune-system deficiency—something you have to shore up," she says. "Basically, you're prolonging life."

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by Cynthia Rubin

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With shopping and cooking and 2,000 suppers to be served daily, Barr Hogen has no time to be a hero.