

Organ Meat Appreciation

Cooking Liver for Liver-Haters



Grass-fed or calf liver is almost always the best liver for eating — look for certified organic or beyond organic.

by WILL WINTER, D.V.M.

If a chunk of liver could be a movie star, which if you have seen *Toy Story*, isn't too much of a stretch, I'm thinking Mr. Liver would look like the beat-up young boxer Rocky Balboa, the muscle-bound, gruff-speaking galoot with a heart of gold. Let's face facts here; liver has been given a bad rap. Maybe only the twin table turn-offs, Limburger cheese and lutefisk, have a worse reputation. Mr. Liver is usually served fresh, and therefore has nothing to do with these two fermented products, but I digress.

At the risk of being a spoiler, this story has a happy ending. In the end, and after 10 hard rounds of getting savage punches and body blows,

Rocky triumphs over the bad guys. Let's hear it for Mr. Liver, I mean, Rocky, no wait, I mean Mr. Liver! And, yes, I really do want Mr. Liver to win his way (back) to your table and to your heart as well.

If you didn't immediately freak out and if you are still reading along, I want you to know that I feel rather qualified to tell this story because I consider myself a specialist in getting liver-hating people to eat and enjoy liver. I will admit right here and now that I know that I have my work cut out for me. So many people have been turned into haters that it really is a health and culinary tragedy. Many are so hardened and jaded they won't even try my liver recipe even once, but this story is for those who might

consider meeting me an inch or two closer than they were before.

Fortunately, I was never among the haters. I grew up in a farm family where wild game and all sorts of cuts from homegrown meats found their way to our skillet and table. Usually my dad and my uncles would compete to see who could be the first to snatch the tasty odd bits off the platter.

Luckily for me, both my parents were excellent home cooks as well, so we ate very well. My mother is still cooking at 97; she takes no prescriptions and will join me in admonishing you to "eat your liver!"

It's my theory that there are two main reasons for the bad reputation liver has achieved; I'm talking to you now, liver-haters. First of all, 99 percent of the liver being cooked in homes, and especially in restaurants, is wretched, deservedly-smelly and toxic because it is almost always liver from confinement animals. That stuff could actually damage your health, and I wouldn't blame you at all for hating it. Secondly, and equally problematic, I'll bet that your mom has been cooking it all wrong. You will soon see how the cooking part can be easily cured. Lastly, and as if these are not reason enough, why would anyone (except a hater) curse a noble category of nutritionally healing meats as "offal?" What a travesty. I say we start calling organ meats "delicacies" or maybe just "num-nums," who knows?

All you liver-haters have plenty of company; many of you even make gagging sounds and gestures when someone mentions the very word. I work for one of the largest and best 100 percent grass-fed gourmet beef producers in the United States, Cannon Falls, Minnesota's very own

Thousand Hills Cattle Company. In our local processing plant, we can document the demise of liver-lovers of the world. Liver's reputation, mostly from the widely-circulated and erroneous myths, has turned off so many of our beef customers that we currently send the majority of our incredibly wholesome and tasty grass-fed liver into various raw pet food recipes. Oh, those lucky dogs and cats! They are getting our best delicacies. It has been my mission to correct this miscarriage of justice. You have been patient long enough so here's the secret:

HOW TO COOK LIVER FOR LIVER-HATERS

Cooking Tip #1

You have to start with good liver! I'm going to aggravate some readers here, but you've got to call a spade a spade: I recommend that one avoid eating all feedlot liver which is pretty toxic in all ways. In fact, liver-haters will quickly remind you that, "hey, the liver is just a big bag of poisons, toxins and heavy metals." Well, there's some truth to that, but what if you kept those toxins out of the animal in the first place? We call that organic husbandry.

Secondly, the liver does indeed "store" things, but, most of all, the liver stores good things; it stores fat-soluble vitamins, minerals and other tasty nutrients. The good guys vastly outweigh the bad guys. Ever wonder why cod liver oil is such a valuable medicine?

Grass-fed or calf liver is almost always the best. Try for "organically raised" or "beyond organic" if possible. Also "pastured pork" liver is fantastic and is very mild-flavored. If you can find it, also try healthy lamb and goat liver. These animals are typically killed when very young, which means a sweeter, more tender and more delicious eating experience. When you buy liver, examine it carefully. It should be smooth as glass, dark-colored, a deep purplish red and have sharply-defined edges and a distinct firmness, not mucky or crumbly (ick), but not hard as a rock either. Avoid liver with yellow spots or blotches, and be particularly care-

FOOD AS MEDICINE

High-Protein Diets Lead to Lower Blood Pressure

Adults who consume a high-protein diet may be at a lower risk for developing high blood pressure according to a recent study. The study, published in the *American Journal of Hypertension*, by researchers from Boston University School of Medicine, found participants consuming the highest amount of protein (an average of 100 g protein per day) had a 40 percent lower risk of having high blood pressure compared to the lowest intake level. Researchers found that adults who consumed more protein, whether from animal or plant sources, had statistically significantly lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels after four years.

Pomegranate Shows Promise in Alzheimer's Fight

The onset of Alzheimer's disease can be slowed and some of its symptoms curbed by a natural compound that is found in pomegranate. Also, the painful inflammation that accompanies illnesses such as rheumatoid arthritis and Parkinson's disease could be reduced, according to the findings of a two-year project headed by University of Huddersfield scientist Dr. Olumayokun Olajide. The key breakthrough by Dr. Olajide and his co-researchers is to demonstrate that punicalagin, which is a polyphenol – a form of chemical compound – found in pomegranate fruit, can inhibit inflammation in specialized brain cells known as microglia. This inflammation leads to the destruction of more and more brain cells, making the condition of Alzheimer's sufferers progressively worse. Dr. Olajide states that most of the anti-oxidant compounds are found in the outer skin of the pomegranate, not in the soft part of the fruit. And he adds that although this has yet to be scientifically evaluated, pomegranate will be useful in any condition for which inflammation – not just neuro-inflammation – is a factor, such as rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson's and cancer.

Eating Pulses Daily May Aid in Weight Control

Eating about one serving a day of beans, peas, chickpeas or lentils can increase fullness, which may lead to better weight management and weight loss, a new study has found. A systematic review and meta-analysis of all available clinical trials found that people felt 31 percent fuller after eating on average 160 grams of dietary pulses compared with a control diet, according to senior author Dr. John Sievenpiper of St. Michael's Hospital's Clinical Nutrition and Risk Factor Modification Centre. His group's findings were published in the journal *Obesity*. Pulses have a low glycemic index (meaning that they are foods that break down slowly) and can be used to reduce or displace animal protein as well as "bad" fats such as trans fat in a dish or meal.

Pistachios May Lessen Vascular Stress

Among people with type 2 diabetes, eating pistachios may reduce the body's response to the stresses of everyday life, according to Penn State researchers. "In adults with diabetes, two servings of pistachios per day lowered vascular constriction during stress and improved neural control of the heart," said Sheila G. West, professor of biobehavioral health and nutritional sciences. West and her colleagues investigated the effects of pistachios on responses to standardized stress tasks in patients with well-controlled Type 2 diabetes who were otherwise healthy.

THE HARVEST TABLE

ful about poultry liver which is almost always yellowish. Birds that are truly free-range have dark, healthy and delicious livers.

Here's something that you probably didn't know; the so-called "liver smell" that so many liver-haters are quick to point out, is actually not really liver. This foul odor is from the out-gassing of poisons, toxins and excess bodily waste products of commodity feedlot animal liver, not only that, the tissue itself is actually slowly becoming necrotic (dying) as well. No wonder people hate it. The livers of animals raised in this manner are so filled with toxins that most are in a state of pre-death just before they are harvested.

As any chronic alcoholic is doomed to discover, the liver, which is the hardest-working organ in the body, takes the heat for an abusive lifestyle. All feedlot cattle, most dairy animals and confinement hogs or birds, due to the push of excess grain, have a chronic condition known as hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver syndrome). Yes, I know, I just described foie gras, which almost deserves its own article, but let's just say that I'm not here to rec-

ommend the typical foie gras to your plate either. Confined animals are usually more exposed to manure and bad air as well. You don't want to be eating it. If the animals are on antibiotics, wormers, insecticides, hormone implants or other drugs, guess where these drugs are concentrated? On the other hand, liver and other organ meat from deer, elk or moose is extremely delicious and nutritious if it's harvested and field-dressed properly. Never waste it. Even liver from trophy-sized animals is usually delicious.

Cooking Tip #2

Cut the liver into very, very thin strips, one-third to one-half of an inch, and only a few inches long. Be sure to de-vein if there are some large ones (this step is for neophyte eaters only). If you are trying to make converts, cutting the liver into fine strips is the most important part of this story.

Cooking Tip #3

Roll the wet strips in flour until covered. Optional: roll in raw egg first to create an extra-crispy crunchy crust – I don't do this myself but it is delicious. Also optional: If you don't know the actual source of your liver (not a good thing, but sometimes necessary) you can pre-soak your liver in fresh milk for about 20 minutes which is said to help detoxify it and make it taste better.

Cooking Tip #4

In a skillet with a bit of bacon grease or lard, caramelize some onions, cooking them until they are translucent, and then put them aside.

Cooking Tip #5

Fry the floured liver strips quickly in a cast-iron skillet with about one-third to one-half-inch of very hot lard or bacon grease. If the grease doesn't sizzle furiously when the strips are added it wasn't hot enough. For liver-haters, cook it almost well-done, for the rest of us, rare or medium-rare is ideal. Optional: I like to add fresh crushed garlic (or minced garlic from a jar) to the lard before I fry the liver. This is good for your own liver and digestion, plus it adds amazing flavor. Sea salt and fresh-ground black pep-

per are nice additions as the liver fries.

Cooking Tip #6

Spoon the fried onions over the top of the right-out-of-the-skillet liver and serve hot. I love rare liver cooked this way, then served with a dollop of fresh horseradish, yum! A good side dish to liver is a helping of sweet potatoes or yams drenched in butter.

WHY SERVE LIVER?

Liver is one of the most important "super foods" of the world! We need to eat this powerful food. Again, it must be from drug-free, free-range, non-toxic animals. Since it's also super-concentrated, we don't need to eat it every day, just one good meal a week is perfect. Children need to eat liver even more than adults. Get them started on liver very young, like 2-3 years of age. We would be hard-pressed to find anything healthier to put into our bodies. So, try to eat one good meal of liver every week, home-cooked is best; I don't trust the average restaurant. When I've cooked liver in this manner for guests I've actually had them reaching across the stove only to start gobbling it hot right out of the skillet and dripping with grease. Their body deficiencies are so profound they will consume a pound of it or more, without any other side dishes. I quite often crave it and have been known to have eaten it like this as well.

By the way, the less one cooks the liver, the better the nutrition and flavor as over-cooking destroys nutrients in all foods. When recuperating from a serious chronic illness, auto-immune problems, or when detoxifying, one of the best ways to get healthy is to add raw liver to any blender drink. The liver of a healthy animal, contrary to popular belief is not a "bag of poisons," it's the organ in the body that stores vitamins, minerals, enzymes and other powerful nutrients. Polar bear liver is the only species of liver that you cannot ever eat. Why? There is so much vitamin A stored in it that one tiny serving can be fatal. The Inuits know this and will not eat it. The polar bears live at the top of

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WHY FRY IN LARD?

There are only four cooking oils that will hold up under fry heat; lard, tallow, coconut and palm. These are good oils, in spite of what the politically correct doctors try to tell us. The so-called “vegetable” oils (they are not really from vegetables), canola, soy and corn are the most prevalent, will break down quickly under heat. Don’t heat butter either as it is quite fragile under heat. Butter is fine for lightly cooking, for example, eggs under low heat. The now-popular vegetable oils are also all GMO products, and they are all loaded with the inflammatory omega-6.

Saturated fats are the only way to go; we need them in our diet. Heart attacks and even strokes were virtually unheard of before Crisco and Margarine came into the American diet. Crisco is a made-up word that stands for “Crystallized (hydrogenated) Cottonseed Oil,” a waste product that clever marketers turned into pure white death in a can. All the solid oils except pure virgin coconut and palm are hydrogenated, a terrible killer hidden within processed food. Unless you know the source of the lard, be careful because grocery store lard is usually hydrogenated and therefore turned into junk food. Try to buy lard directly from the farmer who raised the hogs. Farmers’ markets are usually a great source of quality lard and tallow.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT EATING ORGAN MEATS

I have only scratched the surface of the topic of cooking with organ meat here. The main goal today is to overcome previous phobias and to teach new flavors by frying. The real fun begins once one has broken the ice and begun to savor the true flavor. I make several liver pâté dishes that could also be gateway foods for novices. I highly recommend them, especially my Three Root Liver Pâté which includes the ground roots from fresh horseradish, ginger and turmeric.

Sweet Liver and Onions

Our German babysitter suggested this recipe for liver and onions. It is delicious and definitely makes liver easier to swallow for those who are not fans.

- 8 slices nitrite/nitrate- and sugar-free bacon
- ¼ cup unsalted butter or fat of choice, divided
- 2 large onions, sliced
- 3 apples, cored and cut into eighths
- 2 tablespoons coconut vinegar
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 calf’s liver, washed, dried, and cut into bite-sized pieces
- juice of 1 lemon
- ½ bunch fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish
- sea salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place the bacon on a cookie sheet, and set in the oven until crisp, 10 to 15 minutes. Reserve the bacon for garnish.

Pour a few tablespoons of the bacon grease into a skillet over medium heat, and add a tablespoon of the butter. Sauté the onions in the fat, stirring occasionally, until they are soft. Add the apples, and cook for another 5 minutes. Add the vinegar and the wine, and bring the mixture to a boil. Boil for a few minutes, allowing the mixture to thicken a bit. Turn off the heat and stir in the honey. Set aside.

In a clean skillet, heat the remaining 3 tablespoons butter and add the liver. Sauté the liver for 3 to 4 minutes, turning occasionally, until it’s browned and slightly pink in the middle. Add the liver to the apple mixture, and squeeze fresh lemon juice on top. Remove to a serving bowl or platter, and garnish by crumbling the reserved bacon and sprinkling it on top, along with the chopped parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Crumbled raw blue cheese or Gorgonzola makes a wonderful addition if desired. Serves 4 to 6

Source: *The Heal Your Gut Cookbook: Nutrient-Dense Recipes for Intestinal Health Using the GAPS Diet* by Hilary Boynton and Mary G. Brackett. Reprinted with permission from Chelsea Green Publishing.



THE HARVEST TABLE

In addition to pâté, I've made many great Old World sausages using liver and other organ meats that are equally amazing. All the tips about selecting wholesome liver apply here as well. Part of the big fun is finding all the various particular recipes that excite your taste buds. In addition, raw liver may be used medicinally; the most common method is to introduce it into a yogurt smoothie drink. When liver of excellent quality is used, it's virtually impossible to detect even several ounces of liver in each blender drink. The health benefits are stunning.

Several recent trends have been turning the tide, not the least of which is the Paleo food movement. Cavemen knew about organ meats and relished them. Modern paleo doesn't ask one to eat gobs of raw wooly mammoth liver, good luck with finding that at Whole Foods anyway, but the Paleo people want us to discover the modern versions and eat them in similar ratios and amounts. Most people who find a comfortable version of the Paleo diet will discover that it is a great way to lose excess blubber and regain good health, immunity and fertility.

Obviously, we are a sick, diabetic, fat and cancer-ridden nation. Many people are looking for answers and one of the best places to dig is into the

Pre-Modern world. We know from archeology and digs into ancient ruins that people were once taller than people throughout most of "modern" history and they had larger brains and were assumed to be more intelligent. The nutrients in liver and other organ meats are particularly responsible for building strong brains and strong bodies.

We know that grain-eating to excess and, really, domesticated agriculture itself has damaged our health in many ways. Dr. Weston A. Price, a truth-seeking holistic dentist from the 1930s traveled the globe in search of the basic guidelines of real nutrition truth. One of his most amazing finds was the manner in which ancient and indigenous cultures savored organ meats, including liver, brain, bone marrow and thymus glands. These nutrient-dense special foods were saved for those in most need – growing children, pregnant and nursing women and the elderly. One can read about these findings in his opus magnum *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*, which, along with many excellent books where you may find many more reasons and recipes for cooking organ meat, are for sale at the acresusa.com bookstore. For more information about the physiological need for consuming good fat, as well as the details about cooking with oil,

there are several great websites such as eatwild.com, mercola.com and particularly westonaprice.org.

Eating wholesome liver on a regular basis heals every cell in the body, and it is particularly good for restoring, rebuilding and healing our own liver. Over one-third of all Americans are taking statin drugs, a seriously liver-toxic drug. Most Americans have a liver so damaged and devitalized that they cannot destroy allergy particles, cannot detoxify environmental poisons, carcinogens or oxidative particles, nor can they digest their food properly. It is time to take our American cuisine back! Perhaps we can do it one liver-hater at a time.

Will Winter is a holistic herd health consultant and livestock nutritionist who hangs his hat in Minnesota. He is also a traveling teacher focusing on sustainable agriculture and traditional nutrition. He provides consultations and natural livestock supplies to farmers, and also raises his own pastured hogs, hair sheep and meat goats. For more information visit www.grassfarmersupply.com, call 612-756-1232 or email holistic@visi.com.

The Heal Your Gut Cookbook: Nutrient-Dense Recipes for Intestinal Health Using the GAPS Diet by Hilary Boynton and Mary G. Brackett is available from the Acres U.S.A. bookstore. Boynton and Brackett will be speaking at the 2014 Acres U.S.A. Conference. For more information see page 18 or visit www.acresusa.com.