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Chapter **1**

Introducing the Air Fryer

If you're new to air frying, this chapter is for you! Here, we explore the mechanisms involved in air frying foods and show you how to use your air fryer. After reading this chapter, you'll feel confident and clear on how to air fry your food! We end the chapter with a no-nonsense guide to the pros and cons of air frying, so you know what you're getting into.

Getting Acquainted with Air Frying

When was the last time you enjoyed a decadent meal at a fair? You know the kind of food we're talking about: those greasy, fun foods you only get once every few years, the ones that bring you back to your childhood memories of late summer nights spent underneath the starlit sky with your best friends.

More often than not, the cooking method used to make those foods was deep frying. Although deep frying has its purposes (it's an efficient way to cook a large volume of food quickly), it isn't the best when it comes to health.

For years, engineers spent countless hours trying to come up with a user-friendly machine that would satisfy consumer desire for those rich and crispy fried foods, but they had a tough time replicating an appliance that could check all the boxes.

Everything changed in 2010 when a man with a vision, Fred van der Weij from Philips, finally saw it come to life, and the air fryer, as we've come to know it today, was born! Since then, many companies have brought similar air fryer models to market, designed to cook foods in a similar way.

In this section, we take a closer look into what air frying actually entails.

How air frying works

Have you ever seen one of those money machines, where someone steps inside a cylinder, closes the door, and air starts flowing up from the bottom with money flying through the air?

An air fryer is kind of like one of those money machines. When you put your food into the air fryer and close it, hot air circulates around the food and begins to cook it. The temperature of the air fryer and the type of food you're cooking will help determine the amount of time you need to cook your recipe.



REMEMBER

The big difference between air frying and traditional deep frying is that air fryers require minimal to no oil to cook the food. The hot air circulating around the food helps to impart that crisp texture instead of the oil involved in deep frying.

A few other technologically advanced mechanisms are involved, but this is the gist of how air frying works.

If you're familiar with convection ovens, where hot air is circulated (as opposed to conventional ovens, where the heating element is on the bottom), you'll feel right at home with air frying. An air fryer is essentially a compact convection oven.



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If you want to get a bit more science based, what's actually happening from a chemical perspective when food is cooked in an air fryer is something called the *Maillard reaction*. The Maillard reaction is often referred to as “non-enzymatic browning,” or basically a reaction that happens between sugars and amino acids in a recipe that result in the end product taking on a new flavor, texture, and color.

Different models on the market

Just like most big kitchen appliances on the market today, the air fryer has lots of options. There is a make and model out there that will suit your needs and preferences. Here are the big factors that separate them:



TIP

- » **Price:** Air fryers can range anywhere from \$50 to over \$300, depending on what you're looking for. Air fryers at the higher end of the price range usually have more bells and whistles, as well as a higher wattage.

We've tested out \$60 models and \$200 models and can honestly say we've had similar experiences with both. Bottom line: You can produce a quality, air-fried food with any air fryer.

- » **Size:** Are you cooking for yourself? Two? Four? More? The more mouths you have to feed, the bigger the air fryer you'll want to look for.

Most models have about a 3- to 6-quart fill capacity, but some of the larger models on the market can hold up to 16 quarts. When you decide on how much counterspace you have and how many you'll typically be cooking for, you'll know the right model to choose.



TIP

Each of us has three mouths to feed in our homes and the 3-quart models work well for us. Plus, we've used 3-quart models before for entertaining family and friends and even with doubling the recipe, it still was efficient and quick to use.

- » **Style of cooking:** Say what? Yes, the type of cooking style will really be a huge deciding factor in choosing which model to buy. There are three main styles of air fryers you'll find on the market:

- *Paddle type:* Typically, a self-turning fryer in which you add the cooking oil to the pan alongside the food.
- *Basket type:* A drop-in basket that traditionally calls for multiple shakes within the cooking cycle. This type of air fryer requires a little more attention during the cooking process, but it's also a lot less expensive than the other varieties.
- *Countertop oven:* This model resembles a toaster oven and has multiple uses. Depending on the make and model, they're fairly inexpensive and they usually allow for a greater volume of food to be cooked at one time than the basket types do.



TIP

We've tried the basket and countertop oven styles and found both fairly comparable. The only word of caution we have for the countertop oven models is this: Sometimes the heat doesn't disperse as evenly, requiring the items in the back of the air fryer to be rotated more frequently to avoid overcooking.

Seeing the benefits of air frying

Air frying is not only a healthier way to cook some more decadent recipes, but it's also efficient. Many popular models of air fryers claim that using an air fryer instead of a deep fryer can lower the fat of the dish by over 75 percent.

This actually makes sense when you think about. Let's say you're going to make homemade fried chicken. If you were to use the deep-frying method of cooking, you'd traditionally need more than 3 cups of oil to cover the chicken to allow the cooking to ensue. On the other hand, if you were to use the air frying method, you'd need less than a tablespoon of oil.

Not convinced yet? No problem! Here are a few other benefits of air frying:

» **Air fryers can promote weight loss (for certain individuals).** For individuals who currently have a highly processed diet filled with deep-fried foods, switching to air frying will certainly help with reducing caloric intake. A reduction in caloric intake will inevitably result in weight loss.

» **Air fryers can increase consumption of healthy foods, like fish, shrimp, and produce.** Eating seafood at least twice a week, as well as increasing your consumption of fruits and vegetables, is highly recommended. If you struggle with getting your family to eat more of these foods on a regular basis, then air frying may be the best way to change their appetites (and minds!).

Not only can you put a light crunchy coating of heart-healthy nuts on some of your fried seafood favorites and cook them in the air fryer, but you can do the same with new herbs, spices, and vegetables! This is a great way to explore new vegetables and flavors in your kitchen, too.

» **Air fryers are safer (for the most part) than deep fryers.** Deep frying can cause splatters of exceptionally hot oil all over your kitchen. Air fryers get super-hot as well, but they don't splatter in the same way a deep fryer does.

As long as you practice important safety measures when taking foods in and out of your fryer (for example, don't put your hands on the fryer basket), you can feel secure in using your fryer.

» **Air fryers can reduce the risk of potentially harmful agents on certain foods.** A compound called *acrylamide* naturally forms on carbohydrate-rich foods (those traditionally deep-fried foods like french fries, breaded meats, and so on) when cooked at high temperatures. Some studies have found an association between acrylamide and cancer. The jury's still out on whether acrylamide actually *causes* cancer. (You can read more about it at the website of the American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/acrylamide.html.)

What you need to know is that air frying is associated with a *decreased* amount of this compound as compared to deep frying, but some may still be present.

We firmly believe in balance and moderation. We wouldn't recommend you eat french fries (even air-fried ones) daily.



REMEMBER



REMEMBER

» **Air fryers can reduce the risk of preventable diseases affected by diet and nutrition.** This varies depending on many factors like your genetics and current lifestyle habits (such as nutrition and exercise). That said, if your diet is heavy in processed, fried foods, the air fryer may just be the ticket to enjoying the foods you crave in a new, exciting, and healthier way.

Not only can you modify the amount of sodium in your recipes and use more fresh herbs and spices to give flavor to the food instead of salt, but you can also increase the fiber in your diet while including more plants in your meal plan. In Part 2, we show you how the air fryer can roast and bake your favorite veggies, too.

Using Your Air Fryer

Each make and model of air fryer has its own instructions, but air fryers don't require extensive knowledge to operate. We recommend that you start by reading the manual that came with your air fryer and getting to know your particular machine.

With that said, here are a few basic steps that work for all machines:

1. Clean the air fryer basket and accessories (if they came with your air fryer) with hot soapy water and dry with a dish towel before use.

2. Plug in your air fryer and preheat it.

This allows the machine time to get to temperature before you actually put the recipe inside.

3. If applicable, select Air Fry as the function.

Some models have a variety of selections to choose from such as Dehydrate, Roast, and so on.

4. Place your food on the wire rack or trivet, securely seal or close the drawer, and begin to air fry.

5. Check the food as applicable, following the recipe instructions.

6. When cooking completes, press Cancel and unplug the air fryer.

Caring for Your Air Fryer

You don't have to invest in any specific detergent or cleanser to keep your air fryer smelling like new. Use this section as your guide to keep your new kitchen appliance in tip-top shape so you can use it for years to come.

Cleaning your air fryer

Cleaning your air fryer is actually a really simple task. With a little elbow grease, some regular dish detergent, and hot water, your air fryer will come back to life, even with the toughest of buildup.

We've experimented with various makes and models and had our fair share of epic disasters in our air fryers (think: cream cheese melted with panko all over the baking tray), but guess what? After letting the basket and/or tray cool, we were easily able to get the buildup off with a regular kitchen sponge and hot soapy water.

Plus, even when switching between seafood and a decadent dessert, the air fryer doesn't require a deep clean.

Wipe down the outside of your fryer after each use. A hot, soapy towel is all that's necessary. This helps get off any grease or food particles that may have latched on during cooking.



TIP

Your air fryer manual may say that the parts to wash are dishwasher safe, but we recommend that you hand wash them instead. Why? Because hand washing will keep your air fryer in better shape than putting it through the wear and tear of the dishwasher. Just spend 5 minutes to give it a thorough hand wash after each use, and you'll have a properly working air fryer for years to come.

Storing your air fryer

You can purchase a snazzy air fryer cover online, but this isn't necessary. We store our air fryers on the countertop because, well, we're writing a cookbook and we use them more frequently! Unfortunately, many models are too bulky for under-the-counter storage. Wherever you choose to store your air fryer, just be sure to put it in an area of your kitchen that isn't near your stovetop or oven so you don't get the residual grease from your day-to-day cooking building up on the outside of it.



WARNING

Avoid storing air fryer tools inside the air fryer. It's too easy to plug in your air fryer, forgetting to check the basket first, only to find that you've air-fried your tools. Instead, find a nice, safe spot to store all the useful kitchen gadgets to accompany your machine.

Taking Safety Precautions When Air Frying

You can take a variety of steps to help keep you and your family safe when using your air fryer. Use this list as a guide to practice safe air frying:

- » **Use your air fryer in an open space.** Even if you have a tight kitchen space, when you're using your air fryer, make sure to place it in an area that doesn't have a cupboard or other cabinet above. This way, the heat produced from the high-temperature cooking won't cause your cabinets to get too hot.
- » **Use oven mitts when removing the basket and/or trays from your air fryer.** You don't need special air fryer oven mitts — just use whatever you have on hand that allows you to safely grasp the air fryer basket, tray, or even kitchen tools that you've used to make your recipe.
- » **Allow food to cool before tasting it.** This may be challenging, especially when the aroma of the dish envelops your kitchen. But, trust us, resist! Trying foods that are too hot may result in a severe burn on the roof of your mouth.
- » **Don't consume breaded and coated foods more than twice a week.** "Limit not eliminate" is our motto when it comes to these kinds of foods.
- » **Avoid spraying cooking spray on the air fryer basket.** Most cooking sprays on the market contain chemicals that can corrode the material used in the air fryer baskets. A simply mist of olive oil is enough to prevent your food from sticking while also still limiting the amount of oil used in comparison to deep frying. Invest in a mister that you can insert your own oil into.
- » **Invest in a BPA-free air fryer.** To ensure that you're cooking in the safest model of air fryer possible, make sure your air fryer is BPA free before taking it for a spin. This is easily identifiable on the product specification sheet or website for the brand.

BPA is one of a few chemicals used in plastics that can be hazardous to your health.



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