Burns Night

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Burns Night, observed on January 25th, commemorates the life and works of the Scottish poet Robert Burns. It's not only a cultural celebration but also a showcase of Scottish culinary heritage. The traditional Burns Supper offers a variety of dishes, each with its unique nutritional profile.

Burns Night began shortly after the poet's death in 1796. His friends and admirers gathered to honour his memory with readings of his works and a traditional Scottish feast. Over time, this became an annual event, evolving into what we now know as Burns Night, celebrated worldwide by those of Scottish descent and enthusiasts of Burns' poetry.

Scottish cuisine

With its rich history, Scotland, is renowned for its distinctive ingredients and dishes. Rooted in a landscape of rugged coastlines, rolling hills, and fertile lands, Scottish culinary traditions are deeply intertwined with the country's history and culture. The earliest Scottish diet was simple, primarily comprising oats, dairy, wild game, and fruits. Oats, a staple, were consumed as porridge or oatcakes, providing a high-fibre, nutritious base to the diet. Dairy products from cows and sheep added essential fats and proteins. The abundance of wild game and fish contributed lean proteins, vital for physical health. This diet was minimally processed, high in essential nutrients, and low in sugar and saturated fats, laying a foundation for a robust diet.

The Agricultural Revolution brought changes, introducing new crops like potatoes and turnips. These root vegetables became central to the Scottish diet, offering vitamins C and B6, potassium, and fibre. The introduction of root vegetables diversified the diet, enhancing its nutritional value. The expansion of the fishing industry also played a crucial role, with herring and salmon becoming significant. These fish are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, crucial for heart health and cognitive function.

The Industrial Revolution led to urbanisation and a shift in eating habits. Preserved foods like canned meats and vegetables became more common. However, traditional dishes like haggis, made from sheep's offal, continued to provide a unique blend

of protein, iron, and vitamins. The Scots also widely consumed dairy products, notably cheese, providing calcium and protein.

Today, Scottish cuisine combines traditional dishes with modern nutritional insights. There's a renewed interest in locally sourced, organic foods. Venison, a lean red meat high in protein and low in saturated fat, is popular. Scottish berries, like raspberries and strawberries, are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and fibre. Oat-based dishes remain a staple, contributing to a diet high in whole grains.

Scotland's coastal waters offer a bounty of seafood, including mackerel and haddock, rich in omega-3 fatty acids. The country's whisky industry also contributes, albeit more culturally than nutritionally. The moderate consumption of whisky has been associated with certain health benefits, such as heart health, due to its antioxidant properties.

The Burns Night Banquet

- **Haggis:** Central to the Burns Supper, haggis is a savoury pudding containing sheep's heart, liver, and lungs, minced with onion, oats, suet, spices, and salt. It's rich in protein and iron, essential for muscle health and energy levels. The oatmeal in haggis is a good source of fibre, aiding digestion.

- **Neeps (Turnips) and Tatties (Potatoes):** These root vegetables are traditionally served with haggis. Turnips are low in calories and high in vitamin C, vital for immune health. Potatoes are a good source of potassium, vitamin C, and fibre, especially when eaten with their skin.

- **Scottish Smoked Salmon:** Often served as a starter, Scottish smoked salmon is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, crucial for heart and brain health. It's also a great source of protein and vitamin D.

- **Cock-a-leekie Soup:** A traditional soup made from leeks and peppered chicken stock, often containing rice or barley. Leeks are a good source of vitamins A and C, as well as iron and dietary fibre.

- **Cranachan:** A dessert made from a mixture of whipped cream, whisky, honey, fresh raspberries, and toasted oatmeal. Raspberries are high in antioxidants and vitamins, while oats add fibre. The cream, though high in fat, offers some calcium.

- **Scotch Whisky:** While not a health food, moderate consumption of whisky can provide antioxidants. However, it should be consumed responsibly.

While Burns Night foods are steeped in tradition and culture, they offer various nutritional benefits. The emphasis on whole grains, lean proteins, and fresh vegetables contributes to a balanced diet. However, it's important to be mindful of portion sizes and the high fat content in some dishes like haggis and Cranachan.

In recent times, vegetarian and vegan versions of haggis have emerged, providing alternative options that are lower in fat and suitable for different dietary needs. These often use lentils, beans, and nuts, which are excellent protein sources and rich in fibre.

Scottish cuisine's history reveals a deep connection to its natural landscape and resources as showcased in a Burn'. The traditional Scottish diet, with its emphasis on whole grains, lean proteins, and fresh produce, offers numerous health benefits. Modern Scottish cuisine continues to evolve, integrating traditional ingredients with contemporary nutritional knowledge, offering a diet that is both culturally rich and beneficial for health.

Burns Night is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate wellness, combining mindful eating practices, physical activity, and innovative culinary ideas to honour both tradition and health.

Encouraging guests to adopt mindful eating habits enhances their enjoyment of the meal while promoting a balanced approach to indulgence. Taking time to savour the unique flavours of traditional Scottish dishes, appreciating their textures and aromas, creates a more meaningful dining experience. Highlighting the history and nutritional benefits of each dish can foster a deeper connection to the evening's cultural roots.

Offering smaller, tapas-style portions allows guests to sample a variety of foods without overindulging, while lighter accompaniments, such as steamed vegetables or fresh salads, can balance richer dishes like haggis or Cranachan. Portion control is key, especially for high-fat or sugary dishes, and including healthier sides like roasted root vegetables or barley-based salads adds both nutritional value and variety. Staying hydrated by alternating between whisky or other beverages and water ensures guests feel refreshed, while non-alcoholic options, such as herbal teas or sparkling water with berries, offer alternatives for those avoiding alcohol.

Movement is another essential element of wellness that can be incorporated into Burns Night celebrations. Traditional Scottish ceilidh dancing adds an energetic and joyful dimension to the evening, promoting cardiovascular health and coordination while fostering social bonding. Hosting a ceilidh with live music or dance tutorials introduces an authentic cultural experience that keeps guests engaged and active. If space allows, a pre-dinner group walk can set a reflective tone for the evening, with participants sharing stories or poetry inspired by Robert Burns and Scotland's natural beauty.

To further enhance the wellness aspect, Burns Night menus can embrace a fusion of Scottish tradition and Mediterranean dietary principles. The Modi-Med Diet's emphasis on fresh, whole ingredients can breathe new life into classic dishes. For instance, olive oil can replace animal fats in recipes like haggis or oatcakes, while roasted vegetables can be dressed in herb-infused oils for added flavour and heart-healthy benefits. Incorporating more vegetables, legumes, and nuts into the menu allows for modern, plant-based versions of traditional favourites, such as lentil or chickpea-based haggis. Fresh herbs like rosemary, thyme, or parsley can elevate the flavours of dishes like Cock-a-leekie Soup or salmon, reducing the need for added salt. Even desserts can adopt a Mediterranean twist; for example, Cranachan can be lightened with Greek yogurt instead of cream, layered with honey, fresh raspberries, and toasted oats. Pairing this dessert with a soothing herbal tea infused with lemon and thyme adds a refreshing and health-conscious conclusion to the meal.

By incorporating these elements, Burns Night transforms into a celebration that honours Scottish heritage while embracing a modern approach to health and wellness. This fusion of tradition and innovation offers a unique way to enjoy the evening while supporting physical and nutritional well-being.

Derek Mark

Sodexo Executive Chef

I have over 30 years kitchen experience including Street food, large scale events, fine dining in people's homes and film location catering. When I'm not on the pots and pans you will find me in the gym or out for a leisurely walk. Health, food and nutrition are important to me and helps me keep active.

CHICKEN BREAST STUFFED WITH HAGGIS WRAPPED IN FILO WITH WHISKY SAUCE - SERVES 2

Ingredients

Chicken Breast:
- 2 individual chicken breast
- 100g haggis
- 2 sheets filo pastry
- 20g butter

Whisky Sauce:
- Butter 20g
- 30ml whiskey (your choice)
- 50g onions finely diced
- 10g parsley, washed and finely chopped
- 50ml chicken stock
- 100ml double cream
- Salt & pepper to taste

1. Preheat oven to 180°C. Place the chicken breast on a flat clean surface and make a horizontal cut to create a pocket - Place a hand on top of the chicken breast and cut through thick part following the length of the breast, slice through until about 1cm is left on the opposite side to create the pocket.
2. Stuff each breast with half the haggis.
3. Lay the filo pastry sheet on a flat surface, roll the stuffed chicken ensuring the entire breast is covered - you may need to fold the edges over depending on the size of the chicken breast.
4. Melt the butter and brush each filo covered breast. Place onto a baking sheet and place in a preheated oven. Cook for 20-30 minutes, until ready.
5. Cut in half and serve showing the haggis filling.

For the Whisky Sauce:

1. Melt butter in saucepan over a medium heat.
2. Add finely diced onions to the melted butter and cook until soft.
3. Add the Whiskey & Chicken Stock to onions & butter and stir.
4. Add double cream and allow to cook until sauce thickens.
5. Add chopped parsley to the sauce.
6. Season with salt and pepper and serve with your chicken.

CLAP SHOT POTATOES WITH CURLY KALE

Ingredients

- 150g potatoes
- 150g turnip/swede
- 50g curly kale
- 10ml olive oil
- 30ml skimmed milk (or plant based alternative)
- Salt & black cracked pepper

1. Place the peeled potatoes & turnip/swede and a teaspoon of salt into a large saucepan and cover with water. Place a lid on top and bring to the boil - reduce to a simmer and cook for 15-20 minutes or until soft. While these are cooking wash the kale, cut away the thick central stalks and thinly slice.

2. Add the sliced kale to the simmering potatoes & turnip/swede for the final 2-3 minutes of cooking.

3. Strain using a colander and mash with olive oil & milk.

4. Season with salt & cracked black pepper and serve.

RASPBERRY & BLUEBERRY GREEK YOGHURT CRANACHAN

Ingredients

- 50g oats
- 5g flax seeds
- 30ml honey
- 30ml whisky
- 100g raspberries
- 100g blueberries
- 300ml thick Greek yoghurt

1. Pre heat the oven to 190°C. Place the oats & flax seeds onto a baking sheet and into the oven for 3-5 minutes then set aside to cool.
2. Mix the Greek yoghurt, honey toasted oats & seeds, add the whiskey also to this mix.
3. Using the back of a fork, squash ½ of the raspberries and set aside the remaining should be kept whole for garnish.
4. Add ¾ of cooled oats to the Greek yoghurt and mix.
5. Using a suitable size glass layer each component to create the cranachan dessert – Crushed raspberries, yoghurt mix, blueberries, and yoghurt mix.
6. Top with Whole Raspberries and sprinkle with toasted oat & flax seeds.
7. Drizzle with some honey & serve.