# Body and Soul Food

After recovering from a food addiction, Lindsey Williams found that with a few simple changes, Grandma's recipes lost the pound-packing punch while saving the flavor

May 24, 2006 By Denene Millner

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Smothered pork chops and fried chicken aside, Lindsey Williams' weight problem wasn't born in the kitchen at Sylvia's, his grandmother's famed Harlem soul food restaurant. Instead, he packed on pounds in South Carolina at the knee of his great-grandmother Julia Presley, who allowed Williams to taste-test her homemade cakes and pies during summer visits. "I used to like the whip [batter]," Williams said in a telephone interview from his New Jersey home, where he's been promoting his new cookbook, *Neo Soul: Taking Soul Food to a Whole 'Nutha Level* (Avery; $21.95). "I didn't care what the whole cake tasted like. I would eat so much whip, she'd hardly have enough to make the cake.

"I was just a kid who passionately loved food," Williams added. "Anything we did revolved around food—always."

Williams' lifelong struggle with obesity culminated in 1997 with a gaggle of diet failures, a broken marriage and a plethora of serious health problems, including depression, that plagued his 400-pound, five-foot-five frame. But instead of giving up, the then music executive joined a support group at the urging of a close friend. Through a combination of learning about his food addiction, exercise, nutritional education and discipline, he dropped the pounds—and kept them off.

Williams is now personal chef to stars like LL Cool J, Taye Diggs and Chris Rock and extols the virtues of healthy yet savory soul food. Neo Soul features more than 100 recipes, from breakfast to dessert, that call for making simple changes to beloved dishes—like grilling instead of frying chicken and flavoring greens with smoked turkey wings instead of ham hocks.

How does Williams know it works? He now weighs between 180 and 190 pounds and embraces his new lifestyle wholeheartedly.

"I'm a food addict," he says. "To live a normal life, I have to understand, accept and remind myself of that every day. If I pick up food that has ingredients I can't have, I could die. I go to support groups; I go to church; and I consistently ask God to help me. It's working. Thank God."

**Chopped Garden Salad and Balsamic Vinaigrette**

*Serves four*

**Vinaigrette:**

- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ¼ cup balsamic reduction*
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 cup olive oil
- Salt and fresh black pepper to taste

In a blender, combine all ingredients except the oil, salt and pepper. While blending, slowly add the oil. When mixture begins to thicken, turn off the blender. Season vinaigrette with salt and pepper to taste.

**Salad:**

- 2 heads romaine lettuce, shredded
- 2 carrots, peeled and shredded
- 1 bunch watercress, washed, stems removed and leaves chopped
- 2 cups Brussels sprouts, cleaned and shredded
- 2 celery stalks, washed and finely chopped
- 1 pound baby spinach, chopped
- 3 cups broccoli florets, washed and chopped

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients. If you like, add a small amount of dressing and chill for 10 to 15 minutes.

* *To give store-bought balsamic vinegar more depth, pour it into a medium-size stainless steel pot. Simmer over low heat until the vinegar resembles syrup in its consistency. Remove from heat, and immediately chill in an ice bath.*
*Store in refrigerator.*

**Nutritional information per serving:**
(with one tablespoon vinaigrette): 137 calories, 26 grams carbohydrates,
10 grams protein, 2 grams fat, 0 cholesterol, 1 gram saturated fat, 220 milligrams sodium

**Roasted Sweet Potato Salad**

*Serves four*

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh basil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt*
- 2 teaspoons fresh black pepper
- 2 sweet potatoes, cut into medium-size cubes
- ¼ cup honey*

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
¾ cup low fat mayonnaise*

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, combine oil, thyme and basil, 1 teaspoon of the salt and 1 teaspoon of the pepper. Add the sweet potatoes, and toss until well coated. Place the potatoes on a baking sheet, and bake for 20 to 30 minutes, or until soft. Remove from the oven, and let cool completely.
3. In a separate large bowl, whisk together the honey, mustard and mayonnaise and the remaining salt and pepper. Whisk until well combined. Add the cooled potatoes, and toss until well coated. Chill for at least two hours before serving.

**Tip:** Basil is a delicate herb, so be sure to use a very sharp knife when chopping. A dull knife will bruise the leaves and may cause them to turn black.

**Nutritional information per serving:**
322 calories, 53.7 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams protein, 8 grams fat, 996 milligrams sodium

**Diabetics should reduce the salt to ¼ teaspoon and the honey to 1 tablespoon and use fat-free mayonnaise. Modified nutritional information per serving: 261 calories, 29.7 grams carbohydrates, 1.8 grams protein, 13 grams fat, 0 grams cholesterol, 2.9 grams saturated fat, 326 milligrams sodium*

**Barbecued Salmon**
*Serves four*
¼ cup honey*
6 garlic cloves, minced
2 cups tomato sauce*
1½ cups tomato paste*
1 tablespoon onion powder
1 teaspoon dry mustard
3 teaspoons kosher salt*
3 teaspoons fresh black pepper
1 cup apple cider vinegar
1 pound salmon fillets, cut into 4 pieces
1 teaspoon Mrs. Dash seasoning blend

1. Preheat the grill.
2. In a medium saucepan, combine the honey and garlic over moderate heat, and cook until the garlic begins to brown and soften.
3. Add the tomato sauce, tomato paste, onion powder and mustard. Add 2 teaspoons of the salt and 2 teaspoons of the pepper. Mix until completely combined.
4. Add the vinegar, and continue stirring. Bring to a boil, and reduce the heat. Simmer for 6 to 8 minutes, and then set aside.
5. Season the fish with the Mrs. Dash, the remaining 1 teaspoon salt and the remaining 1 teaspoon

pepper.
6. Place the salmon on the grill, and cook 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove from the heat; brush with the sauce and serve.

**Nutritional information per serving:**
460 calories, 48.7 grams carbohydrates, 33 grams protein, 8 grams fat, 750 milligrams sodium

**Diabetics should reduce honey to 1 tablespoon and the salt to ½ teaspoon and substitute sodium-free tomato sauce and tomato paste. Modified nutritional information per serving: 377 calories, 48.7 grams carbohydrates, 33 grams protein, 9 grams fat, 55 milligrams cholesterol, 1.4 grams saturated fat, 228 milligrams sodium*

**Blueberry Buckle**
*Serves ten*
**Cake:**

Nonstick cooking spray
2 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon kosher salt*
¾ cup sugar*
½ stick butter at room temperature
1 egg
½ cup skim or low-fat milk
2 cups fresh blueberries or frozen (thawed and drained)

**Streusel Topping:**

½ cup sugar*
½ cup flour
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ stick butter at room temperature

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 9-by-9-inch square baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, combine the 2 cups flour and the baking powder and salt. Whisk together well, and set aside.
3. In a small bowl, combine the ¾ cup sugar, the ½ stick butter and the egg and milk. Stir until well combined and set aside.
4. Lightly dust the blueberries with flour. Remove excess by shaking the berries in a colander.
5. Add the egg mixture to the dry mixture. Combine well, and then fold in the blueberries. Set aside.
6. To make the topping, combine the ½ cup sugar, cup flour, the cinnamon and the ¼ stick butter in a small bowl. Use a fork to blend until it looks like wet sand.
7. Pour the blueberry mixture into the prepared baking dish. Top with the streusel and bake for about 40 minutes, until golden brown. Remove from the oven, and let cool slightly. Serve slightly

warm.

**Nutritional information per serving:**
266 calories, 42 grams carbohydrates, 4 grams protein, 9 grams fat, 88 milligrams sodium

**Diabetics may reduce the salt to ¼ teaspoon and use a sugar substitute to reduce the sugar and overall caloric content. Modified nutritional information per serving: 233 calories, 42 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams protein, 6.5 grams fat, 20 grams cholesterol, 4 grams saturated fat, 44 milligrams sodium*

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