

A Healthy Twist on Holiday Baking

During the holidays, we all seem to spend a little more time baking. Whether you are making a festive pie for a holiday dinner or a batch of Christmas cookies, a good recipe is dependent on the good use of ingredients.

Each ingredient in a recipe plays a part in the final product. Ingredients not only affect the flavor, but also the texture and appearance of the food. Substitutions can be made in a recipe to make it healthier, or to meet certain dietary needs, but you must be careful with what you change or eliminate from the recipe. Below we will discuss the role of ingredients in baking, and ingredient substitutions to make your holidays a little healthier.

Fats

The fats typically used in baking are butter or shortening. Fats help to make your final product tender, but also add to the flavor, volume, and texture of the food.



If you are trying to reduce the fat in your diet, there are ways to make substitutions to better fit your needs. In cookies, quick breads, and cakes, butter can be replaced with pureed fruit such as prunes, applesauce, or pumpkin. It is generally suggested to replace half the amount of butter with the same amount of pureed fruit. For example, if a recipe calls for one cup of butter, you can use $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter or oil, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of applesauce. You could replace all of the butter with pureed fruit, but it would result in a denser, heavier product.

Another interesting substitution for butter is avocado. In making this substitution, you will be lowering the unhealthy saturated fats in the recipe, and increasing the amount of healthier unsaturated fats. This substitution works best in baked goods with dark chocolate flavors such as fudge brownies and dark chocolate cakes or cookies. In most cases you would substitute one cup of pureed avocado for one cup of butter.



Eggs

Eggs are an essential part of most baked goods. Eggs provide structure to the product, and act as binders, holding the other ingredients together.

If you are trying to follow a low fat, low cholesterol diet, you may want to try using egg whites in your recipe instead of whole eggs. If a recipe calls for one whole egg, you can substitute 2 egg whites. Egg substitutes may also be used, with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup replacing one whole egg.

Surprisingly, flax seeds can also be used as a substitute for eggs. In order to substitute flax seed for eggs, mix one tablespoon of ground flax seed with 3 tablespoons of water until the water is fully absorbed. This can then be added to your recipe in place of one egg. This substitution usually results in a chewier product with a little less volume. It is great for a heart healthy diet because it not only helps to reduce the cholesterol in the recipe, but also increases the healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

Sugar

Most baked goods would not be the same without sugar. Not only is it important for that sweet flavor, but it also helps baked goods retain moisture, and keeps products softer for longer.



With most baked goods, you can reduce the sugar in the recipe by $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ without affecting the final product. Whenever you are reducing the amount of sugar in a recipe, you may also want to try increasing the amount of vanilla extract, this helps to boost flavor without increasing calories. If you are diabetic, you may also want to try non-nutritive sweeteners such as Splenda® or Sweet 'n Low®. These products can vary in how

sweet they are, and some even make products specifically for baking. Instructions for using these products can usually be found on the packaging or on the product website.



Flour

Flour is the ingredient on which most baked goods are based. Flour’s job is to provide the structure for baked goods. There are many different types of flour, but most recipes call for the use of

all-purpose flour.

Using whole wheat flour in a recipe can help to increase the fiber content in a baked good. Using wheat flour can drastically change the texture of a product though, making it dense and heavy. If you would like to use wheat flour in a product, it is suggested to use half whole wheat flour and half all-purpose flour. This will help to maintain the texture of the original product.

To add extra protein to recipes, you could also try substituting some of the flour for almond meal or almond flour. Keep in mind, this will give the final product a nuttier flavor. Since almond meal is heavier than flour, you should only substitute ¼ of the flour in a recipe for almond meal or almond flour. Also, if you are using this in a cake or brownies, it is suggested to use a smaller pan, since the product will not rise as much as the original recipe.

Putting it All Together

When trying recipe substitutions, it is important to try only one substitution at a time. This helps you to identify which changes to the recipe work well. Each time you substitute an ingredient, think of it as a science experiment. It takes some trial and error to come up with the best tasting product that also meets your dietary needs.

Just because it’s the holiday season does not mean you have to forget about your diet. With a little time and effort you can still use your favorite recipes, only with a healthy holiday twist.

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Recipe Calls For...	Substitution
1 cup Butter	½ cup applesauce, pureed pumpkin, or pureed prunes with ½ cup butter or oil (in cookies, cakes, and quick breads)
1 cup Butter	1 cup pureed avocado (in chocolate baked goods)
1 Egg	2 egg whites Or ¼ cup egg substitute Or 1 Tbsp. ground flax seed with 3 Tbsp. water
1 cup Sugar	½ - ⅔ cup sugar
1 cup All-Purpose Flour	½ cup all-purpose flour with ½ cup whole wheat flour Or ¾ cup all-purpose flour with ¼ cup almond flour

Healthy Avocado Brownies

- 1 large avocado
- 1/2 cup unsweetened applesauce
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup coconut flour
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp baking soda

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a blender or food processor combine avocado, applesauce, maple syrup and vanilla.
3. Add these ingredients to a large bowl and whisk in eggs.
4. Add in coconut flour, cocoa powder, sea salt and baking soda and stir until well-combined.
5. Grease an 8 x 8 inch baking dish with coconut oil and add batter.
6. Place in oven to bake for 25 minutes (slightly less for fudgier brownies or slightly longer for more cake-like brownies).
7. Allow to cool for 20 minutes before cutting into 16 brownies.

Recipe from:
<http://www.thehealthymaven.com/2015/08/healthy-avocado-brownies.html>