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Healthy Baking Alternatives



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According to the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a healthy eating plan should limit the amount of calories from added sugars and saturated fat. But does that mean no desserts?

While many baked goods are a major source of both added sugars and solid fats, dessert still can be an enjoyable part of a well-balanced eating pattern. Follow these tips for delicious baked goods with more nutrients and less added sugar and saturated fat.

Watch Portion Size

Keeping portion sizes in check is a primary strategy for incorporating baked goods into a healthful eating pattern. Make portion control easier by preparing miniature desserts such as mini-cupcakes. Or cut brownies and sheet cakes into two-inch squares and portion cookie dough using a one-tablespoon scoop.

Ingredients Matter

Use high-quality ingredients for a more flavorful product that will satisfy cravings even with smaller portions. For example, use vanilla beans instead of extract, opt for high-quality chocolate and make sure your spices are fresh for the boldest flavor.

Incorporate Nutrient-Rich Ingredients

Instead of focusing on what to cut out, why not focus on nutritious ingredients that can be added to your recipe?

- **Add a Fruit or Vegetable**
Try adding shredded or pureed apple, carrot, banana and pumpkin to recipes to boost nutrients, flavor and moisture. You can use these ingredients to add extra flavor and replace some of the butter or oil in the recipe.
- **Try a Whole-Grain Flour**
White whole-wheat flour can be substituted one-for-one for all-purpose flour in most recipes. You also can replace up to half the all-purpose flour in a recipe with a whole-grain flour without making any major adjustments to the recipe.
- **Experiment with Recipes That Use Less-Common Flours**
Try experimenting with recipes such as savory pancakes and waffles that call for chickpea flour. Or try recipes with almond flour, which works well for crusts and can be incorporated into dough for a big punch of flavor and provide a different nutrient profile than wheat flour.
- **Use Low-Fat or Fat-free Dairy Products**
Use lower fat options of milk, buttermilk and yogurt in baking recipes to contribute protein and calcium. Consider swapping cream cheese frosting, which is high in calories and saturated fat and has minimal nutritional value, for a higher protein frosting made from low-fat Greek yogurt.

Reduce Saturated Fat and Added Sugars

You can do this in a number of ways. For instance, try these modifications:

- **Swap Butter for Heart-Healthy Oil**
When modifying a favorite recipe, you generally can trade some of the butter for a heart-healthy oil, such as canola oil. Don't replace all of the butter with oil or you'll sacrifice texture.
- **Simply Cut Sugar**
As a general rule, you can reduce sugar in a given recipe by about 25 percent without noticeable differences. For instance, if a recipe calls for 4 tablespoons of sugar, reduce the amount to 3 tablespoons. When reducing sugar, you may need to increase the liquid in a recipe

There is room for all foods, even baked goods, in a healthy eating pattern. Focus on occasionally enjoying small portions of your favorite treats and experiment with creating healthier versions of favorite recipes for more nutrients in each delicious bite.

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