

Healthy Holiday

Baking



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HEALTHY HOLIDAY BAKING

After my recent column about [Tips for Healthy Holiday Eating](#) folks asked if I had any tips for healthy holiday baking. Frequently people do a lot of baking at this time of year.

Between the cooler weather, the festive mood, and the desire for gift giving, baking just really fits the bill. It's also a great way to spend time together with your family as you make up treats and package them up.

Use caution and don't make too many changes at once. If you have a favorite recipe, or three, that you want to "healthify" you need to do it in steps to make sure that your favorite recipe doesn't turn into a batch of doorstops.

Fat: The first change is to get rid of the hydrogenated fats. Use real butter which is much healthier for you. While a recipe that calls for a whole stick of butter seems horrifying to many folks your body knows how to process it and it won't have the same negative health effects of margarine or shortening. The substitution is one for one. When the recipe calls for 1 C. of margarine, you will need 1 C. of butter.

If you want to reduce the amount of fat in your recipe you can substitute applesauce for some of the fat in the recipe. Typically it is best to not substitute more than half the fat for applesauce.

Other good options to substitute for fat are pumpkin puree (not pumpkin pie filling) and mashed bananas. Be aware that, depending on ripeness, the bananas may add a flavor note and sweetness to the recipe.

Sweetener: Get rid of the white sugar. It is not a healthy choice because it is so highly processed. While the other choices are not lower in calories they are not as processed. For lighter more delicate cookies (like lemon sugar cookies or snickerdoodles) use evaporated cane juice crystals. For denser more flavorful cookies (such as oatmeal raisin) use sucanat, also known as Sugar Cane Natural. For brown sugar, which is typically white sugar with caramel coloring added, turbinado works very well. Although the turbinado crystals are larger it seems to work out just fine and the added moisture in that sweetener makes the difference. The substitution is one for one. You can read more about different sugars [here](#).

You may also want to consider reducing the amount of sugar in your recipe and see how it tastes. This is a change that you would want to make slowly reducing 2-4 T. at a time.

Instead of buying brown sugar you can substitute 1 cup sugar + 1 Tablespoon molasses for light brown or 2 Tablespoons molasses for dark brown sugar, this is usually a less expensive option

Flour: Try using as much whole grain flour as you can. The higher fiber content will help to make this a healthier substitution, however, it is also a more difficult substitution. Too much whole grain flour, if not balanced properly in the recipe, can ruin the batter and turn the cookies into rocks. Start by substituting 1/4 - 1/3 of the flour called for with a whole grain flour. You may find that you need to add a little more water (perhaps 1 t. - 1 T) to make the dough the right consistency. You can read this article to learn more about substituting flours.

Flour is a staple at holiday time. If gluten is not an issue and you are able to consume regular flour be sure to read the label. Do not buy bleached flour as chlorine bleaching agents have been linked to pancreatic issues. Also, avoid bromates (banned everywhere else except Japan and the US) which have been linked to cancer.

Flax: Adding 1-2 T. of fresh ground flax seed is a great way to add a little boost to your cookies. Flax has a nutty delicious flavor and the added fiber content is a great way to modestly lower how quickly your body responds to the sugar in the cookie.

Baking Chocolate: Substitute good quality Dutch process cocoa and you'll cut down on the amount of fat and calories while still providing that great chocolate-y flavor. 3 T. of cocoa and 1 T. butter replaces 1 ounce of baking chocolate. For those who are skeptical the unsweetened baking chocolate has 661 calories and 69 grams of fat. The cocoa + butter combination has 138 calories and only 13.6 grams of fat.

Extras: All those extra add-ins are delicious, but they frequently add a lot of calories and fat as well. If you're adding in nuts, chocolate chips, dried fruit, and such, try cutting down the amount the recipe calls for by about 1/4. You'll find that there is still more than enough to be delicious.

Colors: If you want to have colorful holiday cookies you already know you need to avoid petrochemicals. India Tree offers a vegetable-based [food coloring](#) that you can use instead. They also offer artificial-dye-free [sprinkles](#).

Happy Holidays and happy baking!