

Many recipes can be simply modified to improve nutritional value without compromising on taste

When cooking and baking, each ingredient plays an important role in the overall quality of the finished product. When modifying recipes to create healthier alternatives, the function of that ingredient needs to be taken into consideration.

Fat

Fat helps establish colour and texture. In sweet foods this contributes to flavour, tenderness and moistness. In baked goods, fat prevents the proteins in flour from mixing with the moisture parts of the batter and forming long strands of gluten which can make cakes and biscuits tough, especially if overbeaten.

Saturated fats are often found in animal based products and processed foods. High intakes are associated with an increased risk of heart disease. High saturated fat sources include butter, lard, dripping, copha, palm and coconut oils, some dairy foods and fatty meats. Unsaturated fats which come mostly from plant sources such as olive, canola and peanut oils are healthier types of fat.

All sources of fat, both saturated and unsaturated, are high in kilojoules and ideally the overall fat content of recipes should be minimised. When modifying recipes to decrease the total amount of fat, it is important to replace the fat content with a similar acting ingredient, which also provides moisture and tenderness to the finished product.

Sugar

Sugar contributes to the sweet flavour of products.



Sugar in large quantities is a major source of energy (kilojoules/ calories). Simple modifications of a recipe can decrease the sugar content of products quite considerably, whilst still maintaining flavour.

Portion Sizes

Large portion sizes contribute extra energy (kilojoules/calories). Excess intake of kilojoules can lead to overweight and obesity.



Many baked goods are "treat/ occasional" type foods and therefore large portion sizes are not appropriate.

Fibre

Fibre plays an important role in bowel health (i.e. staying regular) and can be easily incorporated to increase the overall fibre content of recipes. When adding fibre to a recipe, more moisture may be needed to prevent products drying out.



Butter, Margarine and Oils



- Use minimal amounts of unsaturated fats – such as olive, canola or sunflower oil instead of butter.
- For alternative spreads on sandwiches use cottage cheese, mustards, chutney, hummus or avocado.
- Use cooking sprays, baking paper or brush oil onto pan to prevent items from sticking rather than using butter or lots of oil.
- Use low fat cooking methods such as steaming, stir-frying or grilling.
- Experiment with reduced salt soy sauce, lemon juice, vinegars, mustards, herbs and stocks to make lower fat salad dressings.

Milk, Yoghurt & Cheese



- Use reduced fat or skim milk and yoghurt.
- Use reduced fat cheese.
- For baked cheese toppings on casseroles - mix oats/bran/wheat germ/crushed cornflakes with reduced fat cheese or a small portion of a strong tasting cheese such as parmesan cheese.

Cream & Sour Cream



- Used evaporated milk or milk instead of cream in recipes
- Reduced fat evaporated milk can be whipped and used as a cream substitute; it's a good idea to chill it before whipping.
- Low fat ricotta cheese whipped with small amount of icing sugar is also a good cream substitute. Also mix with honey and vanilla for extra sweetness.
- Low fat continental style cottage cheese, low fat cottage cheese and low fat ricotta cheese are all suitable alternatives to cream cheese and sour cream.
- Buttermilk and low fat yoghurts can be substituted for sour cream.

Coconut Milk



- Use coconut flavoured light evaporated milk and a little corn flour (add this at the end as it tends to split if overcooked) as a substitute.
- Use evaporated skim milk with a little coconut essence as a substitute.
- Try low fat yoghurt and a little desiccated coconut (do not boil).

Cakes & Biscuits



FAT

- When preparing biscuits, use 2 tablespoons of fat per cup of flour. Some recipes may ask for more than this – however it is not required.
- Use margarines and oils for cooking rather than butter.
- Pureed fruits and vegetables (e.g. Pureed apple, pumpkin, avocado and banana), low fat yoghurts, fruit juices and buttermilk can be used to replace some of the fat in some recipes. These provide the moisture that fat normally would. Try replacing 50% of the fat in recipes with these products.
- Avoid over mixing or beating lower fat mixtures, as this tends to toughen the final products.

SUGAR

- Using pureed fruits, fruit juice, buttermilk and low fat vanilla yoghurt as alternatives to sugar can reduce the amount of sugar required in recipes.
- Try decreasing the sugar quantity by about 1/4 and add flavourings such as nutmeg, cinnamon and vanilla essence.
- Instead of icing, try using ricotta cheese mixed with fruit and a small amount of icing sugar or sliced fresh fruit.

Pastries & Savoury Foods



- Short crust and puff pastries are high in fat. Use filo pastry and brush layers with reduced fat milk rather than butter/oil.
- Use bread instead of pastry for bases.
- For a pie base try cooked rice mixed with egg white.

Add legumes for extra fibre



- Add legumes such as kidney beans and lentils to 'wet' dishes and mince dishes.
- Mash kidney beans and incorporate into rissoles and burger patties.
- Add four-bean mix or chickpeas to salads or serve a bean salad as a side.
- Make homemade hummus from tinned chickpeas and use as a dip or spread.

Sodium



- Experiment with using dried/fresh herbs and spices as a salt alternative:

Protein	Herbs
Lamb	Thyme and rosemary
Pork	Sage and rosemary
Beef	Basil, thyme and rosemary
Chicken and stir fries	Coriander, mint, ginger and chili
Indian dishes	Cumin, coriander, garlic and ginger
Potato bakes and roast potato	Mixed Italian herbs and garlic
Salads	Oregano and basil or coriander and mint in Thai style salads

- Look for products that are 'low salt', 'reduced salt' or have 'no added salt' when choosing commercial products.
- Sea salt, rock salt, garlic salt and chicken salt are still 'salt'.

Fibre



- Use wholemeal, wholegrain or high fibre breads for all your sandwiches and rolls.
- Add extra salad and vegetables to all menu items where possible.
- Add fruit to baked goods (fresh or dried).
- Leave the skin on vegetables where possible. Avoid overcooking vegetables until they are very soft – allow a slight crunch to retain some of the fibre.
- When baking, substitute half the white flour for wholemeal flour. A little extra moisture may need to be added to prevent drying out.

Gravies & Sauces



- Make gravy using vegetable juices instead of pan juices.

Portion Sizes

- Use mini muffin trays for baking or only fill regular muffin trays to be half full. Avoid the Texas muffin pans as they are too large.
- Use 1 tablespoon of mixture when making pikelets or fritters as opposed to 2 or 3 tablespoons. Freeze leftover quantities.
- Try to have more salad and vegetables on the plate than anything else.
- Place leftovers in lunch containers before serving – that way lunch will be taken care of and dinner portions can be controlled.
- Pre-cut slices, pies and quiches into smaller portions and store for morning teas and snacks.