



"Brown blobs" was how dietician, cookbook author/editor and SAIT Professional Cooking program graduate Mary-Sue Waisman described some of the cookie recipes she received while editing *Cook!*, the latest cookbook from Dieticians of Canada. In an effort to make their recipes healthier, many cooks removed most of the fat in the recipes, mixed in flax and other add-ins and ended up with some decidedly un-cookie-like creations.

While Waisman says she would rather just enjoy a regular cookie with a tall glass of milk and savour every bite, it is possible to make your baking a little healthier without sacrificing flavour or texture.

Trimming the Fat

Fats affect the moisture, texture and sometimes flavour of baked goods. Solid fats like butter, lard, shortening and margarine help to inhibit the formation of gluten (which can cause toughness) and form air bubbles as they melt in the oven, adding flakiness to pastry and tenderness to cookies and cakes.

Because of these unique properties, it's probably not a good idea to get rid of all the fat in a cookie. However, you can replace up to half of the fats with other ingredients that add moisture. On the other hand, recipes that use oil or melted butter can be completely replaced.

Fruit purees, like unsweetened applesauce, are popular. Sweeter and darker fruits, like pureed pumpkins, prunes or mashed bananas, are better suited for chocolate desserts, which help to mask their flavour and/or colour. You may need to adjust the sugar in the recipe.

I have recently been experimenting with bean and lentil purees - just blitz cooked beans or rinsed canned beans in a food processor, or cook up some red lentils and mash them with a fork (they have a similar texture to softened butter). They are neutral in flavour and add protein, fibre and other nutrients to your end product. Low-fat, plain yogurt (particularly thick Greek yogurt) works great too.

Slashing the Sugar

Sugar does more than add sweetness to baked goods. It helps to increase moisture by drawing moisture from the air; it also gives baked goods an attractive golden-brown colour as it caramelizes. Still, I find that for most recipes, I can cut the sugar by 1/3 (or

½ if I am feeling daring) without any negative effects.

Other sweeteners, like brown sugar, honey, molasses, maple syrup, agave nectar, etc, are generally sweeter than sugar, so you can use less. Some people actually prefer these sweeteners as they result in a chewy, rather than crisp cookie. Otherwise, you may need to adjust the amount of fat or other liquids in the recipe.

Nutrition Boosters

Healthy baking is not just about taking away - it can be about adding in as well! Fresh, frozen or dried fruit make a great addition to muffins and cakes. Shredded raw zucchini, or vegetable purees, like sweet potato or cauliflower, can add moisture to recipes and make them less calorie-dense.

My favourite "nutrition boosters" are nuts and seeds - you can fold them in whole into cookie dough or cake batter, or you can replace up to ¼ of the flour in your recipe with ground nuts or seeds for extra fibre, healthy fats, protein and vitamins and minerals including calcium and phosphorus.

Whether you decide to celebrate your holidays more healthfully or full of indulgence, may they be joyful and sweet!



*"Trimming"
for Your
Holiday Baking*



Healthy Homemade Gift Guide

Tired of making the same shortbread or gingerbread cookies every year? Registered Dietician Vincci Tsui shares some of her favourite holiday recipes, with a bit of a healthy twist!

**Christmas
Granola**
*Makes about 1.3 L
(5½ cups)*

I used to be PC and call this "Winter Spice" Granola, but the red and green from the cranberries and pumpkin seeds are decidedly Christmas! Commercial granolas are actually quite high in added fat and sugar; this one is still a little high in calories because of the nuts, but the fat is reduced by replacing most of the oil with applesauce.

750 mL (3 cups) rolled oats
185 mL (¾ cup) pumpkin seeds, hulled, raw
125 mL (½ cup) almonds
125 mL (½ cup) pecans
125 mL (½ cup) sunflower seeds, hulled, raw
10 mL (2 tsp) cinnamon
5 mL (1 tsp) ground ginger
2 mL (½ tsp) nutmeg
2 mL (½ tsp) cloves
1 mL (¼ tsp) allspice
125 mL (½ cup) unsweetened applesauce
60 mL (¼ cup) maple syrup
15 mL (1 Tbs) vegetable oil
250 mL (1 cup) dried cranberries

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a large bowl, mix together rolled oats, pumpkin seeds, almonds, pecans, sunflower seeds and spices.
3. In a small bowl, mix together applesauce, maple syrup and oil.
4. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients, mixing until everything is moistened.
5. Spread mixture evenly on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. The granola should still look and feel a little wet when ready.
6. Allow granola to cool completely, stirring occasionally to avoid clumping. Mix in dried cranberries. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator indefinitely.

Lentil Coconut Snowballs

Makes about 2 dozen



These shortbread-like cookies have about half the fat of regular shortbread as it uses lentil puree for some of the moisture and texture. If you don't have lentils on hand, you can puree rinsed, canned lentils or white beans. They're not too sweet – perfect with a mug of tea, cocoa or mulled apple cider.

45 g (¼ cup) red lentils
60 mL (¼ cup) water
100 g (½ cup) butter, softened
65 g (⅓ cup) sugar
5 mL (1 tsp) vanilla
Pinch salt
250 g (2 cups) flour
45 g (½ cup) unsweetened shredded coconut, plus more for rolling

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Place lentils and water into a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, then let simmer, covered, until all the water has been absorbed and the lentils become soft and turn yellow, 20-30 minutes.

3. Mash into a puree and set aside.
3. In a bowl, cream together butter and sugar. Stir in lentil puree, vanilla and salt.
4. Mix in flour just until moistened and beginning to form into dough. Fold in coconut. Use your hands to press the dough together into a ball.
5. Scoop and shape dough into tablespoon-sized balls and roll in coconut before placing on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 12-15 minutes, until the coconut is toasted and the cookie is beginning to turn golden-brown.

Spiced Cocoa Almonds

Makes about 500 g or 1 L (4 cups)

Almonds are considered one of the healthiest nuts, as they are gram-for-gram higher in protein, calcium, vitamin E, riboflavin and niacin than other tree nuts. They are also a good source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. Add to that the antioxidants from the cocoa powder and cinnamon, and you have a yummy,

healthier version of chocolate-covered almonds. Serve as a snack or wrap up as little gifts for your friends and family.

125 mL (½ cup) water
100 g (½ cup) sugar
454 g (about 4 cups) raw almonds
40 g (⅓ cup) cocoa
10 mL (2 tsp) cinnamon
2 mL (½ tsp) cayenne pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet (or two) with aluminum foil.
2. In a small saucepan, make a simple syrup by bringing water and sugar to a boil until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. Spread almonds in a single layer on baking sheet and bake for 7-8 minutes,

- until fragrant. Drizzle with syrup and toss to coat; continue baking for another 7-10 minutes, stirring once or twice, until the nuts absorb most (but not all) of the syrup.
4. While the almonds are baking, in a small bowl, stir together cocoa, cinnamon and cayenne pepper. When the almonds are ready, sprinkle cocoa mixture over almonds and toss to coat. Don't worry if not all of it sticks to the almonds. Let cool completely. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to nine months.



Fall is Here



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