



RECIPE MAKE-OVERS: A FEW EASY TIPS TO MAKE RECIPES HEALTHIER

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Can you call your beloved grandmother's malva pudding recipe healthy? Delicious as can be it includes butter, sugar, cream, eggs and apricot jam to name just a few and then comes the custard too. Not to worry – you can keep this in your recipe collection by making just a few modifications. In fact, your ingredient substitution talents can transform an unhealthy recipe in no time without influencing the taste and texture of the foods you prepare. Here are a few tips you can use to make your recipes healthier while still impressing your friends and family, even grandma won't know that her recipe has been altered.

1. DECREASE THE AMOUNT OF FAT, SUGAR AND SALT

Often, we can decrease unhealthy ingredients without compromising the taste and flavour of recipes. Let's take a closer look at the unhealthy culprits and what can be done.

- **Fat:** when baking we can easily use half the amount of fat such as butter, margarine or oil and replace the other half with applesauce, apple juice (when replacing oil), mashed banana or prune puree¹.
- **Sugar:** sugar not only adds flavour to our recipes but also helps keep the baked product fresher for longer, is a bulking and raising agent and adds moisture and structure². Though sugar has many functions, to keep our recipes on the healthy side we can decrease sugar by a third to half, you can use a ¼ cup sugar per 1 cup flour³. Add spices such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and all-spice¹. Flavourings such as vanilla, caramel or almond extract can help boost flavour. If you would like to use more natural sugars you can replace 1 cup of sugar with ¾ cup honey, or ¾ cups maple syrup or ⅔ cup agave or 1 teaspoon stevia⁴.
- **Salt:** for many recipes salt can be reduced or even eliminated. Main dishes, salads and soups can easily be seasoned with herbs and spices such as cumin, cayenne, paprika, black pepper, oregano, lemon peel, garlic and onion powder, and rubbed sage⁵. You can also reduce salt by half in baked goods that do not require yeast. Recipes containing yeast are more of a challenge as salt helps with the leavening of the baked good to ensure it is not too dense or flat.

2. HEALTHY SUBSTITUTIONS

Healthy swops can help reduce the calorie content, fat and salt but even better many of the substitutions can help make the recipes more nutritionally dense.



- **Pasta:** use whole-wheat pasta instead of white pasta as this is much higher in fibre. Try adding steamed ribbons of zucchini, pumpkin or carrot to your spaghetti³. When preparing sauces try stay away from creamy sauces and stick to tomato based.
- **Dairy:** prepare meals and desserts with low-fat or fat-free milk/yoghurt. Cream is extremely high in fat and calories, prepare meals with a white sauce base and add limited cream if you must. Alternatively use half and half. For salads and dressings cream can be replaced with plain yoghurt.
- **Meat:** choose mostly lean options. Try scale back on meat when making casseroles, stews or soups by adding more vegetables and plant proteins¹. You will not only be increasing the fibre and reducing the fat but will also have more vitamins and minerals.

3. ELIMINATE OR CUT BACK ON SOME INGREDIENTS

In some recipes ingredients can be eliminated or the amount used can be scaled back.

- **Toppings:** items that are used out of habit or for appearance can be eliminated. Frosting, coconut or whipped cream toppings can all be eliminated this will help decrease fat and calories¹.
- **Condiments:** olives, pickles, butter, syrups, sauces, jelly, mayonnaise and mustards may be high in salt, sugar and fat. Use fresh condiments instead such as cherry tomatoes vs. olives, cucumber vs pickles, non-fat, lite or reduced fat spreads vs. mayonnaise or butter. Instead of jellies and syrups, cut up fresh berries that are mashed, thin slices of fruit or your own mint sauce is better^{1,6}.
- **Cheese:** although super delicious cheese is high in calories, fat and salt. If the recipe calls for 1 cup of grated cheese, use ½ cup instead⁶. Also look at replacing cheese with a stronger tasting cheese such as parmesan and then use less thereof.

4. HEALTHY COOKING AND PREP TECHNIQUES

Using different preparation methods and techniques can help make your recipes a lot healthier without compromising on taste, flavour and texture.

- **Cooking method:** braising, grilling, poaching, sautéing, steaming and boiling are healthier cooking methods.
- **Basting liquid:** instead of basting the meat or adding oil or drippings to your vegetables, use a small amount of wine, vegetable juice, fruit juice or fat-free vegetable broth¹.
- **Non-stick cookware:** using non-stick cookware or spraying pans with non-stick spray is much healthier as you will be reducing the amount of fat and calories added to your meals.



5. FOCUS ON PORTION SIZE

Although this article places focus on making recipes healthier no matter how hard we try to reduce, switch or eliminate certain ingredients, some recipes may still be high in fat, salt and sugar. The only way to win is then to cut down on your portion size.

- **Eat slowly:** by eating slowly you give your body time to recognise that you are full.
- **Check portion sizes:** many portions today are so big that you may not really realise what the correct portion is. Look at tools to help you, the plate model/hand model may come in handy. Use smaller plates, spoons and cups, read labels and try not dish up more than once.
- **Plan:** plan ahead when going out for dinner to ensure you don't go overboard. Take precautions such as splitting the dish with your dining companion, skip the bread basket, ask for sauces on the side. Remember it's not necessary to have a starter, main and dessert. Lastly, it's fine to take a doggie bag and have the rest tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

Next time you prepare a recipe have a glance over the ingredients and make some notes on how to switch it up with healthier ingredients. This will also help you remember what you did the next time you cook. Remember Rome wasn't built in a day. Recipe alterations may take some time but once you have mastered it you will be able to enjoy and appreciate your foods even more. Finding the right combination for the desired taste, consistency and nutrients – will well be worth the trouble.

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REFERENCES

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