

Bulletin #4167, Altering Recipes for Better Health

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Overweight and obesity are problems affecting Americans. Being overweight or obese can raise your risk of diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancers. In Maine, 65% of adults are either overweight or obese.¹ The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that we reduce the amount of fat, sugar, and salt that we eat. These same guidelines encourage us to include more fiber in our diets by eating whole grain foods and more fruits and vegetables. One way to improve your diet is by reducing the amount of the foods you normally eat or by eating fewer foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt. Another way to improve your diet is by altering the recipes of the foods that you are now eating by using less fat, sugar, and salt.

Changing the Ingredients

Some recipes can be altered by reducing an ingredient or substituting one ingredient for another. Some general reductions and substitutions to reduce the amount of fat, sugar and salt in your diet, while increasing fiber, are provided below.

Goal: Decrease total fat and/or calories.

Eating less will help to reduce the amount of total calories you consume. You can also reduce the amount of fat in a recipe to help reduce the calories in that food. Fat can often be reduced by up to 1/3 in many recipes. For example, if the recipe has 6 tablespoons of oil or fat, reduce to 4 tablespoons of oil or fat. This works best in gravies, sauces, puddings, and quick breads. Low-fat or nonfat yogurt or cottage cheese may be substituted for sour cream in some sauce and dip recipes, and low-fat cheese can be used in place of higher fat cheese in recipes. In most recipes, skim (non-fat) or 1% milk can be substituted for whole milk, and evaporated skim milk may be substituted for cream in some recipes calling for whipped cream.

Instead of this:	Try this:
Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat —in general cooking	Use 1/4 less liquid oil or solid fat called for in the recipe. Example: If the recipe calls for 1 cup oil or fat, only use 3/4 cup. Example: If the recipe uses 1/4 cup shortening, only use 3 tablespoons oil.
Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat —in baking	Use applesauce or another fruit puree for half of the fat in your recipe. You may need to reduce baking time by 25%. Example: If the recipe calls for 1 cup of fat/oil, use 1/2 cup of fat/oil and 1/2 cup applesauce.
Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat —in pan frying, sautéing, or stir-fry	Use cooking spray, water, broth, and/or nonstick pans to reduce fat in these cooking methods. Or use a different cooking method, such as baking, boiling, broiling, grilling, poaching, roasting, or microwaving.
Whole milk, half and half, or evaporated milk	Use skim milk, 1% milk, evaporated skim milk, fat-free half and half, or plain soy milk with calcium.
Whole-fat cheese	Use reduced-fat cheese, added at the end of the baking time or use part-skim mozzarella.
Full-fat cream cheese	Use low-fat or nonfat cream cheese (Neufchatel cheese), or low-fat cottage cheese pureed until smooth.
Full-fat sour cream	Use nonfat or reduced-fat sour cream or fat-free plain yogurt. <i>NOTE: Yogurt is not heat stable, so avoid substituting it for sour cream in recipes that will be cooked.</i>
Full-fat cottage cheese	Use 2% or fat-free cottage cheese.
Full-fat ricotta cheese	Use part-skim ricotta.
Cream	Use evaporated skim milk.
Whipping cream	Use nonfat whipped topping or cream.
Eggs	Use egg whites (usually 2 egg whites for every egg) or 1/4 cup egg substitute.

Instead of this:	Try this:
Beef with higher fat content or percentage	Use leaner cuts of beef or ground beef, such as sirloin, top round roast, or bottom round roast. Drain fat off of cooked ground beef
Poultry with skin	Remove the skin of poultry or turkey prior to cooking.
Canned fish packed in oil	Use canned fish products packed in water.
Regular mayonnaise or salad dressing	Use low-fat, reduced-fat, or nonfat mayonnaise or salad dressing.

Goal: Reduce sugar.

Sugar can be reduced by 1/3 in a recipe. For example, if a recipe calls for 1 cup of sugar, you can use 2/3 cup of sugar. This works best in home canned and frozen fruits and when making puddings and custards. Reducing sugar in a recipe may be less desirable for cookies and cakes. Less sugar in cookies means less spread, paler crust, less tender texture, and less sweet flavor of the cookie. For quick breads, reducing the sugar may result in less browning, greater tendency to create tunnels, greater tendency to dry out and a quick bread that is less tender than a product with more sugar.

Instead of this:	Try this:
Sugar	<p>Reduce sugar by 1/4 to 1/3 in baked goods and desserts. If a recipe calls for 1 cup, use 2/3 cup. Cinnamon, vanilla extract, and almond extract can be added to give an impression of sweetness. <i>NOTE: Do not remove all sugar in yeast breads as sugar provides food for the yeast.</i></p> <p>Replacing the amount of sugar described in a recipe with a sugar substitute works well for most baked products. Calorie-free sweeteners are hundreds to thousands of times sweeter than table sugar, so be sure to read the label when performing the conversion. The sweet taste will vary with product combination or amounts of each sweetener used.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Using the alternative sweetener products affect the baking time, browning, and texture of the product. Not all sugar substitutes are recommended for baking.</i></p>
Fruit-flavored yogurt	Choose plain yogurt and add fresh fruit slices, or use light versions of yogurt.

Instead of this:	Try this:
Frozen or canned fruits with sugar	Use unsweetened frozen fruit or fruit canned in its own juice, or water. If you preserve your own fruits, decrease or eliminate sugar when you can or freeze them.
Syrup	Substitute pureed fruit, such as no-sugar-added applesauce or lite or sugar-free syrup.

Goal: Reduce sodium.

Salt may be left out or reduced by 1/2 in many recipes. For example, if the recipe calls for 1 tablespoon of salt, use 1 1/2 teaspoons. Try using different herbs and spices instead of salt to add flavor to recipes and foods.

Herb or Spice	Food Combination
Basil	Tomato dishes and tomato sauces, and fresh pesto
Chives	Salads, fish, potatoes and tomatoes
Cilantro	Salsa and with tomatoes
Dill	Carrots, fish, green beans, cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes and use in dips
Oregano	Peppers, tomatoes and tomato sauces
Parsley	Potatoes and salads
Rosemary	Chicken, fish, lamb, pork, roasted potatoes, soups, stews, tomatoes and breads
Sage	Use as a poultry seasoning and in stuffing
Thyme	Try with eggs, lima beans, potatoes, poultry, summer squash and tomatoes

Instead of this:	Try this:

Instead of this:	Try this:
Salt	Cook foods without adding salt. Or reduce salt by 1/2 in most recipes (except in products with yeast). Don't put the salt shaker on the table during meals.
Seasoning salt or spice mixes with salt	Use salt-free seasonings and spice mixes. Use herbs, spices, lemon juice, or vinegar to flavor food instead of salt. Avoid seasonings that are high in sodium, including bouillon cubes, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and meat tenderizers.
Frozen or canned vegetables	Choose frozen vegetables without sauces. Use no-salt-added canned vegetables. Draining and rinsing canned vegetables and beans with water will also help reduce sodium.

Goal: Increase Fiber.

Whole grain flour can be substituted for 1/4 to 1/2 of all-purpose white flour. For example: If a recipe call for 3 cups of all-purpose white flour, use 3/4 cup whole grain flour and 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour.

Instead of this:	Try this:
White bread	Choose 100% whole-wheat bread or 100% whole-grain bread.
All-purpose white flour	Substitute whole-wheat flour for up to 1/2 of the flour. For example, if a recipe calls for 2 cups of flour, try 1 cup of all-purpose flour and 1 cup minus 1 tablespoon of whole-wheat flour. Use white whole-wheat flour or whole-wheat pastry flour for total amount of all-purpose flour.
White rice, pasta, or other enriched grains	Use whole grain pasta, brown rice, wild rice, whole cornmeal, whole barley, bulgur, kasha, quinoa, or whole-wheat couscous.
Iceberg lettuce	Use romaine lettuce, kale, baby spinach, and other dark green leaf lettuces.
Peeled fruit and vegetables	Find ways to add extra fruits and vegetables to recipes, such as adding carrots to spaghetti sauce. Use the peel when appropriate, such as leaving apple peels in apple crisp and including the skin of zucchini when making bread. Remember to wash fruits and vegetables just prior to using.
Meat	Use more dried beans, peas, and lentils. Substitute beans for meat one time a week by adding lentils to your spaghetti sauce.

Reference

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health. BRFSS Prevalence & Trends Data. 2015. Accessed Dec 11, 2015.

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