

Baking can be a relaxing and rewarding pastime that parents can share with their children. Baking promotes a variety of skills, including the ability to follow instructions and make measurements.

Baking also employs mathematics, making baking a rather delicious science experiment. Perhaps one of the few pitfalls of baking is indulging in too many sweet treats when taste testing and then enjoying the fruits of your labors.

But bakers concerned about their health can substitute healthful ingredients when recipes call for foods bakers would prefer to avoid. The following ingredients can make healthful additions to baked-good recipes without sacrificing flavor.

How to bake healthier treats

- **Whole wheat flour:** Flour is at the heart of many baking recipes, including those for cakes, cookies and pies. Refined white flour may not be the healthiest ingredient, so try whole wheat flour, which is full of nutrients and an extra dose of fiber. Fiber can help lower the risk for heart disease and diabetes. Try slightly less than one cup of whole wheat flour for regular flour as a swap if a recipe calls for one cup of flour.

- **Fruit puree:** When a recipe calls for oil, margarine, butter or shortening, consider replacing such ingredients with fruit purees, which often add moisture and texture just as well but without the same amount of calories. Applesauce and prunes can be helpful in chocolate dishes. Pumpkin or sweet potato are other purees that can add a nutritional boost as well.

- **Greek yogurt:** Greek yogurt is a powerhouse of protein and flavor with relatively few calories per serving. It can make a super substitution in recipes for things like sour cream, buttermilk or even cream cheese.

- **Applesauce:** Believe it or not, unsweetened applesauce also can replace some or all of the sugar in a recipe. When doing a 1:1 ratio swap, reduce the amount of liquid in the recipe by 1 cup.

- **Marshmallow or meringue:** Ever check the nutritional information for many store-bought cake frostings? They pack a considerable amount of calories, sugar and fat. Some also are made with hydrogenated oils. Consider using a

marshmallow fluff or homemade meringue to top cupcakes or decorate cookies.

- **Stevia:** Stevia is an herbal plant that grows primarily in South America. Stevia has a long history as a sweetener in that area, and now has become a popular sugar substitute elsewhere. Stevia is an all-natural, no-calorie, no-carbohydrate sweetener. The FDA approved only the purified form of stevia, called stevioside. Remember to check each brand's sugar-to-stevia ratio to make sure you get the right measurements for your recipe.

- **Egg whites:** Replace a whole egg in a recipe with two egg whites or 1 cup of egg substitute.

- **Chocolate nibs:** Nibs are processed morsels that do not have the same amount of added sugar as many chocolate chips. Dark chocolate nibs can provide a healthy dose of antioxidants as well.

- **Evaporated skim milk:** Try evaporated skim milk in place of heavy cream to make whipped cream for a low-fat option.

Baking brings family a together, and the treats prepared can make an enjoyable finale to a great meal. With healthful substitutions, any recipe can be altered for the better.