

Altering Recipes for Better Health

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that individuals reduce the daily amount of fat, sugar, and sodium they consume and add more fiber by eating whole-grain products and more fruits and vegetables.

One way to improve your diet is to use less fat, sugar, and salt in the recipes that you prepare at home. Some recipes can be made healthier simply by reducing an ingredient or substituting one for another.



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To start with, try these general reductions and substitutions in your recipes:

- Reduce sugar by $\frac{1}{3}$.
- Fat can often be reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$.
- Leave out the salt or reduce it by $\frac{1}{2}$.
- Replace $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of refined flour with whole-grain flour.
- Use yogurt or cottage cheese instead of sour cream in some sauce and dip recipes.
- Choose lowfat cheese in place of higher fat cheese.
- Substitute skim milk for whole milk in most recipes.
- Use evaporated milk or whipped, nonfat dry milk in place of whipped cream in some recipes.

You can also use these tips to achieve specific nutrition goals and make your recipes more nutritious.

Goal: Decrease total fat and/or calories.

| Instead of this: | Try this: |
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| Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat—in general cooking | Use ¼ less liquid oil or solid fat called for in the recipe. If the recipe calls for 1 cup, use ¾ cup. If the recipe uses ¼ cup shortening, use 3 tablespoons oil. |
| Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat—in baking | Use applesauce or prune puree for half of the fat in your recipe. You may need to reduce baking time by 25%. <i>NOTE: While these products cut calories, they may increase carbohydrate content.</i> |
| Butter, margarine, oil, shortening, or solid fat—in 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, but add it at the end of the baking time or use part-skim mozzarella. |
| Full-fat cream cheese | Use lowfat or nonfat cream cheese, Neufchâtel, or lowfat 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.</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 ¼ cup egg substitute. |
| Beef with higher fat content | Use leaner cuts of beef or ground beef, such as sirloin, top round roast, or bottom round roast. |
| Poultry including skin | Remove the skin of poultry or turkey prior to cooking. |
| Canned fish | Use canned products packed in water. |
| Regular mayonnaise or salad dressing | Use lowfat, reduced-fat, or nonfat mayonnaise or salad dressing. |

Goal: Reduce sodium.

| Instead of this: | Try this: |
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| Salt | Cook foods without adding salt. Or reduce salt by ½ in most recipes (except in products with yeast). Don't put the saltshaker 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 catsup, chili sauce, chili powder, bouillon cubes, barbecue sauce, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and meat tenderizers. |
| Frozen or canned vegetables | Choose frozen vegetables without sauces. Use no-salt-added canned goods. Rinsing canned vegetables with water will also help reduce sodium. |



Goal: Reduce sugar.

| Instead of this: | Try this: |
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| Sugar | Reduce sugar by ¼ to ½ in baked goods and desserts. If a recipe calls for 1 cup, use 2/3 cup. Cinnamon, vanilla, 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> Replacing the amount of sugar described in a recipe with a sugar substitute works well for most baked products. The FDA has approved six calorie-free sweeteners: acesulfame-K (or acesulfame potassium), aspartame, neotame, saccharin, stevia, and sucralose. They 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. <i>NOTE: Using the alternative sweetener products affect the baking time, browning, and texture of the product.</i> |
| Fruit-flavored yogurt | Choose plain yogurt with fresh fruit slices, or use light versions of yogurt. |
| Frozen or canned fruits with sugar | Use unsweetened frozen fruit or fruit canned in its own juice, water, or light syrup. <i>NOTE: Some canned fruits now come labeled as "no sugar added" but have Splenda® (sugar substitute), which counts as 10 gm/serving of carbohydrate.</i> 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 sugar-free syrup. |

Goal: Increase fiber.

| Instead of this: | Try this: |
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| White bread | Choose 100% whole-wheat bread and 100% whole-grain bread. |
| All-purpose flour | Substitute whole-wheat flour for up to ½ 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 or enriched grains | Use whole grain, brown rice, wild rice, whole cornmeal (not degermed), whole barley, bulgur, kasha, quinoa, or whole-wheat couscous. |
| Iceberg lettuce | Use romaine lettuce, endive, and other leafy lettuces or baby spinach. |
| 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. |
| Meat | Use more dried beans and peas. Add legumes and lentils to many different dishes. Try adding lentils to your spaghetti sauce. |

Sources

“Altering Recipes for Better Health,” Alabama Cooperative Extension System publication HE-560.

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“Modifying a Recipe to be Healthier,” Ohio State University Extension publication HYG-5543-06.

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