

## Modify Recipes and Food Preparation *to Promote Health*

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The link between diet and health is important. Food alone cannot make you healthy. Good eating habits, based on variety and moderation, can help keep you healthy and even improve your health. Good eating habits include knowing how to prepare and select foods that fit into the Dietary Guidelines.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans ([www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)) recommend that we cut back on foods high in solid fat, added sugars and salt. One way to help meet those recommendations is to modify our recipes and methods of food preparation. This is relatively easy because many recipes are higher in fat, sugar and salt than is needed for good flavor and quality.

To reduce or eliminate fat, sugar or sodium in a recipe you will first need to identify the ingredients that contains these components. Fat, sugar and salt can be reduced in amount, eliminated completely or replaced with a more nutritious ingredient.

Fat is the most concentrated source of calories. Each gram of fat supplies 9 calories, compared to 4 calories for each gram of protein or carbohydrate and 7 calories for each gram of alcohol. Reducing the amount of fat in a recipe is the most effective way to cut calories, along with making the recipe more healthful.

Ingredients can be eliminated completely, reduced in amount, or replaced with a more nutritionally acceptable ingredient.

- Not all recipes need modification. To decide which recipes may need modifications ask the following:

- Is the recipe already low in fat, cholesterol, sugar or salt? If so, only minor or no changes may be needed. If a recipe calls for one egg and the dish serves eight people, the amount of cholesterol per serving already is relatively low.
- How often is the food eaten? It is not as important to modify a recipe for a dish eaten once or twice a year as it is for foods eaten more often. It is more important to cut the fat in a weekly tuna fish salad sandwich than it is to cut the fat in a birthday cake.
- How much of the food is eaten? Sometimes the best way to modify the intake of a certain food is to eat less of it. Decreasing the quantity eaten may be more satisfying than decreasing the quality. Many people prefer to eat less real jam or jelly than to eat the regular amount of a low-sugar jam.

Here are a few ways to update recipes. These suggestions apply to most foods except when specific proportions of ingredients are essential to prevent spoilage (such as cured meats, pickles, jams and jellies).

### **Decrease Total Fat and Calories**

- Reduce fat by one-fourth to one-third in baked products. For example, if a recipe calls for 1 cup hydrogenated shortening, try  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup oil. This works best in quick breads, muffins and cookies.
- In recipes such as muffins and snack cakes, try replacing half to all of the fat with prune puree, lowfat yogurt or unsweetened applesauce. The pectin in these "fat replacers" helps hold the product together and gives the mouth-feel of fat. Because they add sugar calories, you also may want to decrease the added sugar by one-fourth.
- Cut back or even eliminate added fat in casseroles and main dishes. For example, browning meat in added fat is unnecessary because some fat will drain from the meat as it cooks. Use a microwave oven, nonstick pan or cooking spray.
- Sauté or stir-fry vegetables with little fat or use water, wine or broth.
- To thicken sauces and gravies without lumping, eliminate fat and mix cornstarch or flour with a small amount of cold liquid. Stir this mixture slowly into the hot liquid to be thickened and bring it to a boil, stirring constantly. Add herbs, spices and flavorings.

- Chill soups, gravies and stews; skim off hardened fat before reheating to serve.
- Bake, broil, grill, poach or microwave meat, poultry or fish instead of frying.
- Decrease the proportion of oil in homemade salad dressings. Try one-third oil to two-thirds vinegar. Low-fat cottage cheese or buttermilk seasoned with herbs and spices also makes a low-fat dressing.
- Use reduced-calorie sour cream or mayonnaise. To reduce fat further, use plain low-fat or nonfat yogurt, buttermilk or blended cottage cheese instead of regular sour cream or mayonnaise for sauces, dips and salad dressings. If you heat a sauce made with yogurt, add 1 tablespoon of cornstarch to 1 cup of yogurt to prevent separation.
- Use skim or low-fat milk instead of whole milk. For extra richness, try evaporated skim milk.
- Choose low-fat cheeses such as feta, Neufchatel and mozzarella instead of high-fat ones such as Swiss or cheddar. Also use less cheese.

#### **Decrease Saturated Fat and Cholesterol**

- Use two egg whites or an egg substitute product instead of one whole egg. In some recipes, simply decrease the total number of eggs. This is especially true if the fat and sugar also are decreased in the recipe.
- Use margarine instead of butter. Look for margarines in which liquid vegetable oil is the first ingredient.
- Use vegetable oils instead of solid fats. To substitute liquid oil for solid fats, use about one-fourth less than the recipe calls for. For example, if a recipe calls for 1/4 cup (4 tablespoons) of solid fat, use 3 tablespoons of oil. For cakes or pie crusts, use a recipe that specifically calls for oil, because liquid fats require special mixing procedures.

#### **Decrease Sugar**

- Reduce sugar by one-quarter to one-third in baked goods and desserts. Add extra spice or flavoring to enhance impression of sweetness. This works best with quick breads, cookies, pie fillings, custard, puddings and fruit crisps.

- In cookies, bars and cakes, replace one-quarter of the sugar called for with an equal amount of nonfat dry milk. This reduces calories and increases calcium, protein and riboflavin in the recipe.
- Make fruit juice coolers with equal parts fruit juice and club soda or seltzer.
- Non-sugar sweeteners can replace part or all of the sugar in many recipes. However, most have limitations. Aspartame (Equal) will not work well in products that are cooked or baked. Saccharin can be used in hot and cold foods, but may leave a bitter aftertaste. Neither product can provide the volume or structure that sugar does, so rather than substitute, it's best to choose recipes especially tested for use with non-sugar sweeteners.

### **Decrease Sodium**

- Salt may be omitted or reduced in most recipes. Do not reduce salt in cured meats or pickled or brined vegetables - it acts as a preservative. A small amount is useful in yeast breads to help control the rising action of the yeast.
- Start with a gradual reduction. For example, if a recipe calls for 1 teaspoon of salt, try 1/2 teaspoon. If you reduce the amount of salt gradually, you'll soon adjust to a less salty flavor.
- Rely on herbs and spices for flavor, rather than salt.
- Use garlic or onion powder instead of garlic or onion salt.
- Omit salt from water when cooking pasta, noodles, rice or hot cereals.
- Try fruit juice or wine for cooking liquid instead of broth or bouillon.

### **Increase Fiber**

- Whole-wheat flour usually can be substituted for part or all of the all-purpose flour. If a recipe calls for 2 cups of all-purpose flour, try 1 cup of all-purpose and 1 cup of whole-wheat flour. When completely substituting whole-wheat for white flour, use 7/8 cup whole-wheat flour for 1 cup of white flour.
- Add extra fruits and vegetables to recipes.

- Add fruits to muffins, pancakes, salads and desserts, and add vegetables to quiche fillings, casseroles and salads.