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COOKIE TIME IS HERE!

It’s the second week of December, so we’re now in full swing – rushing, cooking, and shopping! How many of you have gone through your recipe files to choose your Christmas cookies selection? All of us have the family favorites and the traditional holiday cookies that make the season even more special. Home baked treasures are such fun to give and receive. An afternoon spent in the kitchen with parents and children can be a memorable holiday activity. Here are some tips for baking and sharing your holiday cookies.

When baking holiday treats for the elderly and shut-ins take into consideration the fat, sodium and calorie content. Try baking fruit breads made with whole wheat flour or use rolled oats in your topping for fruit crisps. Look for recipes that call for egg whites rather than whole eggs or substitute 2 egg whites for each whole egg. Use skim milk or low-fat milk rather than whole milk. Substitute fat-free sour cream or yogurt for sour cream.

To fit into your busy holiday schedule, most cookies can be baked ahead of time. They can be frozen in air-tight containers for maximum flavor retention or stored at room temperature in airtight containers.

For the cookie-swap party or nursing home visits be sure to wrap each variety of cookie separately in plastic wrap so that flavors don’t mingle. Add a little colorful cheer by sprinkling with red and green sugar or dotting with candied fruit.

TIP: For perfectly shaped round cookies pack homemade refrigerator cookie dough into clean 6-ounce juice cans (don’t remove bottoms) and freeze dough. Thaw cookie dough about 15 minutes; then open bottom of can and push up, using the top edge as a cutting guide.

Now to send those fresh baked cookies, here are some cookie packaging suggestions. Choose cookies that are hardy, so they can stand the trip. Crisp cookies are quick to crumble and break. Soft cookies such as bars, fruit cookies, drop and molded butter cookies are generally the best travelers. Due to the humidity, hot and cold temperatures and rough handling your package may encounter, avoid mailing sticky cookies or cookies topped with icing.

Use a strong cardboard box or metal container. Line with waxed paper or aluminum foil, and put a cushion of crumpled waxed paper, plastic wrap, or cellophane straw on the bottom.
Wrap cookies in pairs, back to back, with waxed paper between. A moisture-vapor proof material, such as plastic wrap, safely holds the fine flavor while the cookies bounce along the miles. Pack snugly in rows, with heavy cookies at the bottom. Tuck popcorn, puffed cereal, or crushed waxed paper into the holes to prevent jiggling. Cover each layer with a cushion of waxed paper or paper towels, and don't forget to put an especially fat layer to cushion the top!

Tape box shut, print address on box (if paper becomes torn en route, the address will not be destroyed with it) and wrap in heavy brown paper. Tie securely. Print name and address plainly on front of package, and label "Fragile, Hand with Care." You've done your part, now wait for the complements!

Spread some of that holiday cheer this season by trying some of the nutritious low-fat cookie recipes which follow:

**SPICY GINGERBREAD CUTOUTS**

2/3 cup margarine, softened  
2/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar  
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda  
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon  
2 teaspoons ground ginger  
1 teaspoon ground cloves  
2 to 3 tablespoons water  
Vegetable cooking spray

Cream margarine and sugar, beating at medium speed of an electric mixer until light and fluffy.

Combine flour, soda, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves; add to creamed mixture, stirring well. Add water, 1 tablespoon at a time; stir with a fork until dry ingredients are moistened. Cover and chill at least 1 hour.

Divide dough in half. Roll half of dough to 1/8-inch thickness between 2 sheets of heavy-duty plastic wrap. Remove plastic wrap. Cut dough with a 2-inch round or shaped cookie cutter, and place on cookie sheets that have been coated with cooking spray.

Bake at 375° for 7 to 9 minutes or until lightly browned. Cool on wire racks. Repeat procedure with remaining half of dough. Makes 7 dozen cookies (35 calories each), Protein 0.5, fat 1.5, carbohydrates 4.9, iron 0.2, sodium 32, calcium 7.
MERINGUE KISSES

3 egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar
Vegetable cooking spray

Beat egg whites (at room temperature) in a large bowl at high speed of an electric mixer until foamy. Sprinkle vanilla and salt over egg whites; beat until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating until stiff peaks form.

Drop meringue by 2 level teaspoonfuls per cookie or pipe, using a No. 7 star tip, 1 inch apart onto cookie sheets that have been coated with cooking spray. Bake at 200° for 2 hours and 15 minutes or until dry. Cool slightly on cookie sheets; remove from cookie sheets, and cool completely on wire racks. Store in an airtight container. Makes 6 1/2 dozen cookies (11 calories each), Protein 0.1, carbohydrate 2.6, sodium 6.

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