

# Modifying a Recipe to Be Healthier

Revised by **Pat Brinkman**, Extension Educator, Ohio State University Extension

The USDA's *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* emphasizes the need for Americans to reduce the amount of fat, sodium (salt) and added sugar consumed, while increasing the consumption of fiber. When buying food, we can check the label, but when using a recipe, we might need to make some changes by substituting ingredients or changing the cooking technique. Just like we substitute when we're out of a certain ingredient, we can make changes in a recipe to make it healthier.

This fact sheet provides ideas to decrease the amount of fat, calories, salt (sodium) and sugar in recipes. Ways to increase fiber in recipes are also provided to help you make more nutritious food. Remember, you can experiment with recipes and change ingredients. You might also be able to find recipes that, although similar to yours, actually have less fat, sugar and salt. They might even have more additions of nutritious ingredients. Have fun when cooking: Experiment!

<b>Tips to Decrease Total Fat and Lower Calories</b>	
<b>Instead of this:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
Shortening, butter, margarine or solid fat	Use $\frac{1}{4}$ less liquid oil or solid fat called for in the recipe. If recipe calls for 1 cup, use $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. If recipe uses $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shortening, use 3 tablespoons oil. Use equal amounts of oil for melted shortening, margarine or butter.
Shortening, butter or oil in baking	Use applesauce or prune purée for half of the butter, shortening or oil. Might need to reduce baking time by 25 percent.
Butter, shortening, margarine or oil to prevent sticking	When frying foods, use cooking spray, water, broth or a nonstick pan.
Frying in fat	Use cooking methods such as bake, boil, broil, grill, poach, roast, stir-fry or microwave.
Fat to sauté or stir-fry	When frying foods, use cooking spray, water, broth or nonstick pans.
Whole milk, half-and-half or evaporated milk	Use skim milk, *Skim Plus, 1% milk, evaporated skim milk, fat-free half-and-half or plain soy milk with calcium. (*Use of brand name does not indicate an endorsement of the product.)
Full-fat cream cheese	Use low-fat or nonfat cream cheese, Neufchâtel, or low-fat cottage cheese puréed until smooth.
Full-fat sour cream, full-fat cottage cheese or full-fat ricotta cheese	Use nonfat or reduced-fat sour cream, fat-free plain yogurt, or Greek yogurt. (Yogurt is not heat stable.) Use 2% or fat-free cottage cheese. Use part-skim ricotta.
Whole-fat cheese	Use reduced-fat cheese, but add it at the end of the baking time or use part-skim mozzarella.
Cream Whipping cream	Use evaporated skim milk. Use nonfat whipped topping or cream. (This is only nonfat if one serving size is used.)
Eggs	Use egg whites (usually 2 egg whites for every egg) or $\frac{1}{4}$ cup egg substitute.
Regular mayonnaise or salad dressing	Use low-fat, reduced- or nonfat mayonnaise or salad dressing. Try flavored vinegars.
Canned fish	Use water-packed canned products or vacuum-sealed pouches.
Fatter cuts of meat (skin on)	Use leaner cuts of meat or ground meat, with the skin removed before cooking.
Ground beef	Use extra-lean ground beef, ground turkey breast or ground chicken breast, without the skin.
Bacon, lunch meats or sausage	Use Canadian bacon or lean ham, low-fat lunch meats or turkey sausage.
Croissants, brioches, etc.	Use whole-wheat French rolls or whole-wheat brown-and-serve rolls.
Donuts, pastries	Use whole-wheat or whole-grain English muffins, bagels and/or other reduced-fat varieties.
Cookies, crackers	Use reduced-fat, low-sodium varieties.



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

[extension.osu.edu](http://extension.osu.edu)

[fcs.osu.edu](http://fcs.osu.edu)

<b>Tips to Reduce Sodium</b>	
<b>Instead of this:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
Salt	Omit salt or reduce salt by half in most recipes, except in products with yeast. Cook foods without adding salt. Don't put the salt shaker on the table.
Frozen or canned vegetables	Choose frozen vegetables without sauces, or use no-salt-added canned goods. Rinsing canned vegetables will help reduce sodium.
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. Seasonings high in sodium include catsup, chili sauce, chili powder, bouillon cubes, barbecue sauce, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce and meat tenderizers. Choose low-sodium versions.

<b>Tips to Reduce Sugar</b>	
<b>Instead of this:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
Sugar	Reduce sugar by one-quarter to one-half in baked goods and desserts. If a recipe calls for 1 cup, use 2/3 cup or less. Add cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla or almond extract to give impression of sweetness. (Do not remove all sugar in yeast breads, as sugar provides food for the yeast.)
Sugar	For most baked products, replace sugar with equal amounts of sucralose (*Splenda). Add ½ teaspoon baking soda in addition to each cup of sucralose used. Baking time is usually shorter, and product will have a smaller yield. Try using aspartame (*Nutra Sweet), saccharin or acesulfame potassium in other products that are not baked. The sweet taste will vary with product combination or amounts of each sweetener used. Check packages of Stevia for substitution, as it can vary. Generally, 1 cup of sugar is equal to 24 packets of Stevia. (*Use of brand name does not indicate an endorsement of the product.)
Fruit-flavored yogurt	Use plain yogurt with fresh fruit slices, or use light versions of yogurt.
Syrup	Use puréed fruit such as no-sugar-added applesauce, or use sugar-free syrup.
Sugar in canned or frozen fruits	Decrease or eliminate sugar when canning or freezing fruits, or buy unsweetened frozen fruit or fruit canned in its own juices, water or light syrup.

<b>Tips to Increase Fiber</b>	
<b>Instead of this:</b>	<b>Try this:</b>
White rice or enriched grains	Use whole-grain rice, brown rice, wild rice, whole cornmeal (not degermed), whole barley, bulgur, kasha, quinoa or whole-wheat couscous.
All-purpose flour	Substitute whole-wheat flour for up to half of the all-purpose flour. For example, if a recipe calls for 2 cups all-purpose flour, try 1 cup all-purpose flour and 1 cup minus 1 tablespoon whole-wheat flour. Use "white whole-wheat flour" or "whole-wheat pastry flour" for total amount of all-purpose flour.
Pastas, crackers, cookies or cereals	Use whole-grain or whole-wheat pastas, crackers, cookies and cereals. Buy reduced-fat versions.
White bread	Use 100 percent whole-wheat bread and 100 percent whole-grain bread.
Iceberg lettuce	Use romaine lettuce, endive and other leafy lettuces, or use baby spinach.
Peeled fruits and vegetables	Add extra fruits and vegetables such as adding carrots to spaghetti sauce and leaving apple peels in apple crisp, zucchini bread, etc. Add extra fruits and vegetables to recipes, and include the peel when appropriate.
Meat	Use more dried beans and peas. Add legumes and lentils to many different dishes. Try adding lentils to spaghetti sauce.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Five Ways to Make Recipes Healthier.” In *Lifestyle Coach Facilitation Guide: Post-Core, Food Preparation and Recipe Modification*. (2014). Accessed at [cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/pdf/postcurriculum\\_session3.pdf](http://cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/pdf/postcurriculum_session3.pdf).
- Mayo Clinic. “Healthy Lifestyle Nutrition and Healthy Eating.” (2014). Accessed at [mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/healthy-recipes/art-20047195](http://mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/healthy-recipes/art-20047195).
- The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. “Heart Healthy Diet: Low Fat, Low Cholesterol, Low Sodium Diet.” (2012). Accessed at [patienteducation.osumc.edu/Documents/heart.pdf](http://patienteducation.osumc.edu/Documents/heart.pdf).
- U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.” (2010). Accessed at [health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp](http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp).
- U.S. Department of Health and Humna Services, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. “Low-Calorie, Lower Fat Alternative Foods.” (2014). Accessed at [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/eat/shop\\_lcal\\_fat.htm](http://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/eat/shop_lcal_fat.htm).
- U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. “Simple, Heart-Smart Substitutions.” (2014). Accessed at [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000746.htm](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000746.htm).

---

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA.

Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration; Associate Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; Director, Ohio State University Extension; and Gist Chair in Extension Education and Leadership.

For Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please contact Ohio State University Extension using your preferred communication (e-mail, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Inform the operator to dial 614-292-6181.

Copyright © 2015, The Ohio State University