

Modifying Recipes

When to Modify Recipes

Not all recipes need to be modified. Consider the following questions when determining if a recipe should be modified.

1. Is the recipe already low in fat, cholesterol, sugar or salt?
If so, only minor or no changes may be needed.
2. 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 food eaten frequently.
3. 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.

How to Modify Recipes

1. Identify the dietary goal and decide which nutrients to modify.
To cut calories, identify what ingredients contribute the most calories and try to reduce the fat and/or sugar. To reduce sodium or to increase fiber, identify the ingredients that contain these components.
Calories: Fat is the most concentrated source of calories. Each gram of fat supplies nine calories, compared to four calories per gram of protein or carbohydrate and seven calories per gram of alcohol. Reducing the amount of fat in a recipe is the most effective way to cut calories.
Fat: Fatty acids are basic components of fat. They are either saturated, monounsaturated or polyunsaturated. All fats in foods are mixtures of these fatty acids.
Saturated fats are found in the largest proportions in fats of animal origin such as whole milk, cheese, cream, lard, butter, meat and poultry. They also occur in large amounts in palm kernel oil and coconut oil.
Monounsaturated fats are found in large amounts in canola oil, olive oil, and peanut oil, as well as in many margarines and semi-solid vegetable shortenings.
Polyunsaturated fats are found in the largest proportions in fats of plant origin such as liquid vegetable oils (safflower, sunflower, corn, cottonseed, and soybean) and margarines and salad dressings made from them.
Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in food of animal origin. Significant sources include egg yolks, meats (particularly organ meats), butter, cream, and cheese.

Sugar comes in many forms, for example, white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, honey, corn syrup, molasses, and maple syrup.

Fiber (important in a good diet) is found in whole grain breads and cereals; dry beans and peas; nuts and seeds; and fruits and vegetables, especially those with edible skins or seeds.

2. Determine how to change the ingredient(s) to achieve the dietary goal.
Ingredient(s) can be: eliminated completely, reduced in amount, or substituted with a more nutritionally acceptable ingredient.

Tips for Healthy Modifications

Here are a few ways to modify recipes. These suggestions can be applied to most food; exceptions include those in which specific proportions of ingredients are essential to prevent spoilage or to create a certain product consistency (such as salt in cured meats or pickles, or sugar in jams and jellies).

1. To decrease total fat and calories:
 - Reduce fat one-fourth to one-third in baked products. For example, if a recipe calls for 1 cup hydrogenated shortening, try 2/3 cup. This works satisfactorily in many quick breads, muffins, and cookies.
 - 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, non-stick pan, or cooking spray.
 - Saute or stir-fry vegetables with little fat or simmer in water, wine or broth.
 - To thicken sauces and gravies without lumping, eliminate fat and instead mix cornstarch or flour with a small amount of cool liquid. Stir this mixture slowly into the hot liquid to be thickened and bring back to a boil, stirring constantly. Add herbs, spices or flavorings.
 - Chill soups, gravies and stews and skim off hardened fat before reheating to serve.
 - Select lean cuts of meat and trim off visible fat. Remove skin from poultry before cooking.
 - Bake, broil, grill, poach or microwave meat or poultry instead of frying in fat.
 - Decrease the proportion of oil in home-made salad dressings. Try one-third to two-thirds vinegar. Low-fat cottage cheese, yogurt, and buttermilk seasoned with herbs also make low-fat dressings.

- Use reduced-calorie sour cream or mayonnaise. To reduce fat further, use plain no-fat or non-fat yogurt, buttermilk or blended cottage cheese instead of regular sour cream or mayonnaise for sauces, dips and salad dressings. If a sauce is made with yogurt is to be heated, add one tablespoon of cornstarch to once cup of yogurt to prevent separation.
 - Use non-fat or low-fat milk instead of whole milk. For extra richness, try undiluted 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.
2. To 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 are also decreased in the recipe.
 - Use vegetable oils instead of solid fats, use about one-fourth less than the recipe call for. For example, if a recipe calls for 1/4 cup shortening or 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.
3. To decrease sugar:
- Reduce sugar by one-fourth to one-third in some baked goods and desserts. Add extra spice or flavorings to enhance impression of sweeteners. This works best with quick breads, cookies, pie fillings, custard, puddings and fruit crisps.
 - Decrease or eliminate sugar when canning or freezing fruits. Buy unsweetened frozen juice or fruit canned in its own juice or water.
 - In cookies, bar and drop, replace one-fourth of sugar called for with an equal proportion of nonfat dry milk; this reduces calories and increases calcium, protein and riboflavin.
 - Choose fruit juices, club soda, or skim milk over soft drinks and punches. Make fruit juice coolers with equal parts fruit juice and club soda or seltzer.
 - Non-sugar sweeteners are available and work well in some applications. Be aware, however, that aspartame (Equal) will not work well in products that are heated. Saccharin can be used in hot and cold foods, but may leave a bitter aftertaste. Neither product can enhance the volume and tenderness of baked products the sugar does. Therefore, rather than substitute non-sugar sweeteners for sugar in recipes, it is best to choose recipes especially tested for use with non-sugar sweeteners.

4. To decrease sodium:
 - Salt may be omitted or reduced in most recipes. Do not reduce the salt in cured meats or pickled or brined vegetables, because it acts as a preservative. A small amount also is useful in yeast breads to help control the rising action of yeast.
 - Start with a gradual reduction. For example, if a recipe calls for one teaspoon of salt, try ½ teaspoon of salt. If the amount of salt is reduced gradually, and individual soon adjusts to less salty taste.
 - Choose fresh or low-sodium versions of products. For example, choose low-sodium soups and broths, soy sauce, canned vegetables and tomato products.
 - Rely on herbs and spices rather than salt for flavor.
 - Use garlic or onion powder instead of garlic or onion salt.
 - Reduce salt used in cooking pasta, rice, noodles, or hot cereals.
 - Dilute broth or bouillon with water when using as the cooking liquid.
 - Read labels. Any ingredient that includes “sodium” as part of its name contains sodium.
5. To increase fiber:
 - Choose whole grain instead of highly refined products.
 - Whole-wheat flour usually can be substituted for up to one-half of the all-purpose refined flour. For example, if a recipe calls for 2 cups of all-purpose flour, try 1 cup of all-purpose and 1 cup of whole-wheat 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.

Source: American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Handbook of Food Preparation, 1993