

How to make healthier meals



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There are two easy ways to change your favourite recipes to be healthier:

1. try healthier cooking methods
2. reduce, replace or remove the less healthy ingredients.

Healthier cooking methods

Try these alternatives, tips and tricks for healthier cooking.

Steaming

- This is one of the easiest ways to cook vegetables
- Bring a small amount of water to the boil in a saucepan. Add prepared vegetables in a steam basket, and place in saucepan. Cover with a lid and steam until vegetables are just tender.
- To add extra flavour drizzle with olive oil and your favourite herbs or squeeze with lemon juice instead of adding salt.

Poaching

A great way to cook delicate foods like eggs, fish or fruit in a small amount of hot water or liquid, which can be flavoured by herbs, spices, reduced salt stocks or vinegar.

Deep-frying

- Instead of deep frying, roast in the oven on a lined tray or grill tray. You can then easily add some chickpeas or lentils to make the meal healthier.
- Lightly steam or microwave food before roasting.
- Brush food with canola, sunflower, soybean or olive oil to make it crisp.
- If you do decide to deep-fry, choose olive oil or high oleic canola oil and discard the oil after cooking.

Shallow-frying/sautéing

- Stir-fry food using olive, canola, sunflower, soybean or peanut oil.
- Try adding lots of fresh vegetables to your stir-fry dishes.

Roasting

- Choose lean cuts of meat or trim all visible fat before cooking.
- Put meat on a rack in a baking dish with 1 to 2 cm water. Add herbs to the water for extra flavour.
- Brush meat with a marinade to stop it drying out. Try covering it with a lid or aluminium foil for part of the cooking time.
- Roast meat on a spit or rotisserie and let the fat drip away.

- Brush or spray vegetables with olive or high oleic canola oil, and bake them in a separate pan from meat.

Casseroling/stewing

- Trim fat off meat before cooking.
- Add legumes for extra fibre and flavour (e.g. kidney beans, chickpeas, soybeans or lentils).
- Use reduced salt stock.
- After cooking, chill the food so the fat becomes solid on the surface. Skim the fat off before reheating.

Healthier ingredients

Try these tips and healthier replacements for common ingredients.

Milk/yoghurt/ cream

- Use unflavoured varieties.
- If you have high blood cholesterol, use a reduced fat variety.
- Use ricotta cheese whipped with a little icing sugar, fruit or milk instead of cream.

Sour cream

Replace sour cream with one of these options:

- cottage cheese blended with milk - add a little lemon juice or vinegar to make it more 'sour' (acidic) if you like.
- natural yoghurt.
- evaporated milk mixed with lemon juice.

Cheese

- Use a small amount of grated parmesan cheese instead of grated cheddar – it gives more flavour and you don't need to use as much.
- Mix grated cheese with oats, bread crumbs or wheat germ to make toppings for casseroles, gratins and baked dishes.

Butter/margarine spreads

- Try avocado, tahini, hummus and nut butters in place of butter
- Avoid using butter, other dairy blends, lard, copha or cooking fats.
- If using a margarine, look for those made from canola, sunflower or olive oils. Read the label and pick one that has less than 20g saturated fat per 100g, less than 0.5g trans fat) and less than 400mg sodium per 100g

Note: reduced fat or 'lite' spreads generally aren't good for cooking.

Oil

- Choose the oil depending on the cooking method and the flavour you are after.
- For low temperature cooking such as salad dressings, sauces and stir-frying, choose an oil with less than 20g of saturated fat per 100g (read the label). Choose sesame, peanut, olive, safflower, canola, avocado oil.
- For high temperature cooking, choose olive oils (including extra virgin olive oil) or high oleic canola oil. These oils are more stable at high temperatures.
- Keep oils away from heat and direct light.
- Don't re-use cooking oils after heating.

Mayonnaise/dressing

- Use salad dressings and mayonnaise made from canola, sunflower, and olive oil.
- Make your own salad dressing and mayonnaise. Use ingredients such as yoghurt, buttermilk, tomato paste, balsamic or other kinds of vinegar, lemon juice, ricotta cheese, mustard or fruit pulp.

Meat/poultry/Fish

- Choose lean cuts of poultry and meats. Limit unprocessed red meat to 1-3 meals per week (max 350g per week).
- Remove all visible fat from meat and skin from poultry before cooking.
- Marinate or add flavour with ingredients such as wine vinegar.
- Sear meat quickly to keep in juices.
- Include meat-free meals in your meal planning.

Cake/biscuit ingredients

- Cook with spreads made from canola, sunflower or olive oil instead of butter.
- Cook with canola, sunflower or olive oil.
- The minimum fat required for biscuits is about 2 tablespoons per cup of flour – this will keep biscuits crisp.
- Make plain sponges, yeast cakes, bread, muffins and scones because they generally use less fat.
- Use wholegrain or wholemeal flour to add some extra fibre.

Pastry

- Use filo pastry. Brush every three to four layers with olive oil, egg white or reduced fat yoghurt.
- Use pastry made with olive oil.

Coconut cream/coconut milk

- Add a little coconut essence to evaporated milk.
- Use evaporated milk already flavoured with coconut essence.
- Soak desiccated coconut in warm milk for 30 minutes. Strain the mixture, discard the coconut and use the milk.
- Occasionally, use a reduced fat coconut milk.

Nuts and seeds

- Use to add texture and flavour and healthy fat sources to your favourite dishes
- Sprinkle on breakfast cereal, yoghurt and add to stir-fry's and salads

Whole-grains

Swap white grain ingredients to wholegrain varieties like wholegrain breads, brown rice and pasta or quinoa.