

# Val's Healthy Healthy Recipe Swap Guide & Tips

FOR EASY, RESTAURANT-STYLE MEALS THAT GET YOU FIT!

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As a Chef, I love inspired, mouth-watering meals. As a Nutrition Coach, I want every meal to fuel my energy, nourish my body and get me in shape! What's my trick to achieving both? Simple yet delicious swaps for healthier meals and recipes. Whether you're new to cooking or an expert chef, discover my lean and clean secrets to making your favorite meals and recipes even more delicious. Keep reading to learn how to get fit with the food you love in your kitchen!

## CHEF TIPS & SWAPS FOR LEAN, FLAVORFUL MEALS

*These are some of my favorite tips to making restaurant-style meals that get you fit!*

- ✓ Use fresh herbs in place of dried herbs for maximum flavor and depth without any additional calories. Fresh thyme (my favorite), basil, cilantro, rosemary, dill, tarragon and sage can literally transform a dish from boring to awesome! Just rinse herbs gently, pat dry and chop. Stir in any fresh herbs during the cooking process to muddle the intensity of the herb while adding depth to the recipe. Garnish with fresh herbs (like basil, cilantro or parsley) at the end of the cooking process or as a garnish for bold, fresh flavor. Try fresh herbs in my [Shepherd's Pie](#), [Game Day Chicken Quesadillas](#), [Maple Apple Turkey Sausage](#), [Corn, Feta and Dill Salad](#), or [White Bean and Rosemary Salad](#).
- ✓ To add depth to a dish, sauce or soup, squeeze in a touch of fresh citrus like lemon, lime or orange. Fresh citrus adds acidity for balance and a whole new dimension of flavor with very little calories. Creating balance with acidity can also help you to reduce the amount of salt. Try this trick in my [Creamy Cauliflower Puree](#) or [5 Minute Chicken, Quinoa & Avocado Toss](#).
- ✓ In place of standard broth or stock, use organic low sodium chicken, vegetable or beef stock to reduce bloating and avoid MSG.
- ✓ To naturally thicken soups or stews without cream, add pureed organic canned cannellini beans (BPA free) or cooked and pureed potatoes. Or try adding uncooked chopped potato or sweet potato or even brown rice (basically anything starchy). As the soup cooks, the starches will come out and naturally thicken the soup.

- ✓ Swap white potatoes for sweet potatoes in any recipe that you can. Sweet potatoes are a “clean” carbohydrate with tons of fiber and vitamins. Try this swap in my [Sweet Potato & Apple Hash](#).
- ✓ In place of regular French fries, try these [Roasted Herb Parsnip Fries](#) that I created for Livestrong.com or roasted sweet potato fries instead.
- ✓ To make a creamy vegetable soup without any cream, try the sauté and puree method. Start by sautéing veggies (onion, garlic, carrots, sweet potatoes, peppers, squash, etc.) Stir in your favorite seasonings and herbs. Add organic low sodium chicken or vegetable stock and cook until soft. Then use a hand immersion blender (another cool gadget I highly recommend to any home cook) or a food processor or blender and puree until the soup is creamy and smooth. Season to taste. This is an awesome way to use leftover veggies you have on hand and it will produce a thick creamy soup without the cream! Try it in my [Homemade Tomato and Basil Soup](#) or my [Carrot Ginger Soup with Mascarpone Cheese](#).
- ✓ When thickening a soup, stew or sauce with roux, sauté equal parts extra virgin olive oil or real butter with Namaste Foods Gluten Free Perfect Flour Blend instead of white flour. It’s similar to an all-purpose flour but has fiber for less of a blood sugar spike.

## **RANDOM SWAPS TO SAVE UNNECESSARY FAT IN A DISH**

*A little fat in every meal is a good thing! Fat slows the rate of digestion and keeps you satisfied until your next meal. The following tricks can help you save the excess fat that you don't need in a recipe without sacrificing any flavor.*

- ✓ Use 1 whole egg plus 2 egg whites to replace 2 whole eggs and save approximately 7 grams of fat. I use this trick when making omelets, savory recipes that call for eggs as a binder like meatloaf and when baking sweets.
- ✓ Use approximately ¼ cup of mascarpone cheese (an outrageously delicious Italian style cream cheese found at your local market) to replace ½ cup of cream or more. Mascarpone cheese will add a smooth richness, creaminess and thickness with less fat than cream. I like to stir in a scoop of mascarpone cheese to finish my Bolognese sauce or garnish soup. If using mascarpone in place of cream in a sauce you may need to add a splash of organic low sodium chicken or vegetable stock (only if the sauce needs more liquid). Try mascarpone cheese in my [Homemade Tomato Soup with Fresh Basil](#) or my [Carrot Ginger Soup with Mascarpone Cheese](#).
- ✓ Use 1% or 2% plain Greek yogurt in place of mayonnaise or sour cream. Or use half yogurt and half mayonnaise or sour cream to lower the fat content while keeping the intended flavor (Greek yogurt will add a fresh, tanginess to your dish so you may need half and half to balance the flavor). Try this combo in my [Lightened Up Lobster Salad](#) or [Homemade Blue Cheese Dressing](#). Greek yogurt can also be used to create a creamy, low-fat sauce like the one used in my [Turkey Burgers with Chipotle Sauce](#) and as a garnish on baked potatoes.

- ✓ With most savory recipes you can reduce the amount of fat that a recipe calls for without affecting the overall outcome too much. For example, if a recipe requires that you sauté with ¼ cup of olive oil or stir in 2 cups of cheese, you can more than likely get away with cutting the amount by 1/3 and sometimes ½. This does not work in a roux.

## POULTRY, BEEF AND PORK TIPS & SWAPS

- ✓ In place of full fat ground beef, use 97% lean ground beef to shave tons of fat. Add a tablespoon or two of all-natural tomato paste (in addition to your favorite herbs and seasonings) to the mix to replace moisture and flavor.
- ✓ Swap full fat ground turkey or chicken with 93-94% lean ground turkey or chicken. Add a tablespoon or two of all-natural tomato paste (in addition to your favorite herbs and seasonings) to the mix to replace moisture and flavor. Try this swap in my [Spring Lover's Meatloaf](#), [Shepherd's Pie](#), or [Farmer's Market Meatloaf](#).
- ✓ To bulk up ground poultry or beef and add vitamins, fiber and moisture, stir in finely chopped mushrooms to the mixture. Try this cool idea in my [Spring Lover's Meatloaf](#).
- ✓ For a healthy and flavorful gravy to smother chicken or pork, use all natural apple cider as the base. Check out how with my [Pork and Homemade Stuffing with Apple Cider Gravy](#).
- ✓ To make lean buffalo or BBQ chicken tenders with way less fat than the fried version, try this easy, three-step process. Whisk together an all-purpose gluten free flour such as Cup for Cup Gluten Free All Purpose Flour or Namaste Foods Gluten Free Perfect Flour Blend (or even regular flour if that's all you have on hand- you only need a few tablespoons) with your favorite seasonings like sea salt, fresh ground black pepper or white pepper, garlic powder and paprika. Toss chicken tenders or chopped chicken breast pieces with the seasoned flour mixture. Next, coat a non-stick pan with an all-natural cooking spray and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Sauté chicken until no longer pink and the outside is lightly golden. Toss the cooked chicken with an all-natural buffalo or BBQ sauce ([see Sauce Swaps section](#)). This technique can work for any chicken recipe that calls for chicken tossed in a sauce. Love it? Check out my [Buffalo Chicken Tenders](#).
- ✓ Digging the leaner fried chicken swap above? Try this one too. Pulse pecans in a food processor (or crush in a ziplock bag with a rolling pin) until they are broken into little tiny pieces. If you use a food processor, be careful not to over-pulse or you'll end up with pecan butter! Combine crushed pecans with garlic powder, sea salt, white or black pepper, paprika and nutmeg and set aside in a shallow dish. In a separate shallow dish, combine eggs with a drizzle of organic honey. Coat chicken pieces in egg and honey mixture and then press into seasoned pecans until fully coated. Next, coat a non-stick pan with an all-natural cooking spray and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and sauté chicken until no longer pink and the outside is lightly golden. Top pecan crusted chicken with a drizzle of organic honey and serve.

- ✓ In place of regular bacon which contains nitrates, try thick-cut, all-natural, “uncured” bacon. Uncured bacon is actually cured, but it is not cured with synthetic nitrates or nitrates that may potentially cause cancer. Also you can use less of it and it tends to be lower in fat than traditional bacon. Whole Foods offers a great variety of all-natural, uncured thick-cut bacon. Try it with my [Bacon, Corn and Avocado Dip](#), [Brussels Sprouts with Bacon and Dried Cherries](#), and [Kale, White Bean and Bacon Soup](#). Seriously, you won't be disappointed.

## GET YOUR GREEN ON

***One of the best habits you can do each day for your health is load up on organic dark leafy greens. Leafy greens are loaded in vitamins, disease-fighting and anti-aging antioxidants and fiber. Here's how to sneak in your greens without even noticing.***

- ✓ Replace iceberg lettuce (it lacks nutritional benefits) with ANY other Green (like spinach, kale, arugula or romaine). Keep an eye out if you buy bagged salads as iceberg lettuce tends to hide out there. Get lots of greens in my [Chicken with Corn, Mango & Black Bean Salad](#), [Energy Salad with Scallops and Citrus Dressing](#) and my [Ginger Lime Lean Green Protein Smoothie](#).
- ✓ Add a handful of chopped raw greens to savory dishes right before cooking or baking, like a meatloaf for example. Or stir in a handful of chopped greens at the end of sautéing any dish for added nutrition and color. Try this trick in my [Spring Lover's Meatloaf](#) and [Farmer's Market Meatloaf](#).

## EGG SUBSTITUTES

***I love eggs because they are a quick and easy source of protein, but if you're Vegan or you ran out of eggs, try the following swaps while baking:***

- ✓ Combine 1/3 cup of water mixed with 1 heaping tablespoon of chia seeds to replace one large egg in your baked goods. Let the mixture sit at room temperature for about 15 minutes or until it's nice and thick. Chia seeds are an awesome source of complete protein, fiber, omega 3 fatty acids, antioxidants and even calcium.
- ✓ Combine one rounded tablespoon of ground flax seed with ¼ cup hot water to replace one large egg in your baked goods. Stir well and let it sit for about 15 minutes. When replacing eggs with flax, you'll notice a subtle nutty flavor and more than likely a wetter, sort of gooey texture, which is delicious in brownies. Flax seeds are loaded in antioxidants, fiber and omega 3 fatty acids.

## DAIRY SUBSTITUTES

***Because dairy can cause bloating, mucus production and inflammation, I tend to avoid it. I'll occasionally eat plain Greek yogurt or real cheese when I do indulge. Other than that, I rely on the swaps below.***

- ✓ Swap dairy milk or cream for unsweetened almond milk or unsweetened coconut milk in both savory and sweet recipes. Try unsweetened almond milk in my [Ginger Lime Lean Green Protein Smoothie](#). And try unsweetened coconut milk in my [Pina Colada Protein Popsicles](#).
- ✓ In place of butter, use Earth Balance Dairy Free Soy Free Buttery Spread. It's non GMO, vegan and tastes amazing. Plus you can use it as a spread, or when frying, sautéing or baking.
- ✓ If a savory recipe calls for butter, replace it with heart healthy extra virgin olive oil or even coconut oil. Both of these choices work well for sautéing too. I used extra virgin olive oil in a lot of my recipes. Try it in my [Energy Salad with Seared Scallops and Citrus Dressing](#).
- ✓ In place of cheese on a sandwich, add heart healthy fat, potassium, fiber and vitamins with avocado or guacamole.
- ✓ In place of dairy yogurt, try unsweetened coconut yogurt.
- ✓ Replace butter in a dessert with pureed avocado, walnut oil, coconut oil, unsweetened apple sauce or mashed banana. See [Reduced Fat Swaps in Desserts](#) and [Swapping Fats for Healthier Fats in Desserts](#).
- ✓ Try [Coconut Creme](#) in place of whipped cream.
- ✓ Swap ice cream with Luna & Larry's Organic Coconut Bliss Non-Dairy Frozen Dessert. It's just like ice cream but better and gluten free, dairy free and sweetened with agave nectar. It's very rich and creamy, so make it a once in a while treat.
- ✓ If a recipe calls for ice cream, try Nice Cream instead! Chop and freeze 4 bananas or use a bag of frozen mango. Puree frozen fruit in a food processor (it won't work in a regular blender) with a splash of coconut or almond milk, organic honey, agave nectar or maple syrup and pure vanilla extract until smooth and creamy like ice cream. Top with nuts or berries if you'd like. Swap ice cream in any recipe with this vitamin-rich homemade treat!
- ✓ In place of whey protein powder, try SunWarrior Warrior Blend Raw Vegan Protein. It's a great source of vegan protein and is gluten free, soy free and dairy free. I like it mixed with almond milk, fruit and nut butter.
- ✓ In place of whey protein powder, try Nutiva Hemp Protein. It's made of hemp with no additives and has 15 grams of complete protein and 8 grams of fiber per serving. I like it mixed with almond milk, fruit and nut butter.
- ✓ In place of whey protein powder, try Manitoba Harvest Hemp Hearts Raw Shelled Hemp Seeds. It's a vegan complete source of protein with healthy fat, fiber and minerals. I like to blend it into my smoothies or mix it into pancake batter.

## JUST SAY NO TO WHITE BREAD

*I'm gluten free so I tend to skip regular bread and bread products. Because of that, I'm forced to get creative with substitutions. Below are both gluten free and gluten filled options for the bread lover in you. No matter what, steer clear from white bread. It can easily spike blood sugar and offers very little nutritional benefits.*

- ✓ Swap bread crumbs for oats as a binder in meatloaf and meatballs. If you're gluten free, get gluten free oats. Try this idea in my [Spring Lover's Meatloaf](#).
- ✓ Swap traditional bread crumbs for Ian's Whole Wheat Panko Bread Crumbs. They add a ton of texture to breaded items and do not contain preservatives, artificial flavors or colors.
- ✓ Swap traditional bread crumbs for Ian's Gluten Free Bread Crumbs. They have no preservatives or artificial ingredients, flavors or colors and are non-GMO. I bread with these often and they taste just like regular bread crumbs.
- ✓ In place of white flour wraps or tortilla, try a gluten free wrap or all natural corn tortilla for added vitamins and fiber. Try a gluten free wrap in [The Cuban](#).
- ✓ In place of white flour wraps or tortillas, try a large sturdy lettuce leaf like romaine or Boston lettuce to get your green on while reducing your carb intake. Try it with my [Lightened Up Lobster Salad](#)

**In place of white bread, try these healthier breads and gluten free options. Organic bread is ideal because it contains significantly less potentially harmful pesticides compared to non-organic bread. I personally use gluten free bread because gluten bloats me.**

### *Gluten free options:*

- ✓ Deland Bakery Bread offers many gluten-free and organic options. Find it in the freezer section.
- ✓ Canyon Bakehouse Gluten Free 7 Grain Bread is not organic but tasty with all natural ingredients. You can find it in the freezer section.

***The criteria for healthy whole wheat bread is simple. Make sure the food label says "whole wheat" and 100% whole wheat flour as the first ingredient. Aim for at least 2 grams of fiber per slice (preferably more). Wraps or "flats" should have 3 or more grams of fiber per serving. Again, going organic helps to reduce harmful pesticides and additives found in most commercially made breads.***

- ✓ Food For Life (Ezekiel's) Organic Sprouted Grain Breads are all natural, organic, high in fiber and available in the freezer section at many super markets.
- ✓ Whole Foods Organic [100% Whole Wheat Bread](#)

- ✓ Vermont Bread Company Organic Whole Wheat Bread
- ✓ In place of pizza crust, try Glutenfreeda Artisan Flatbread and Pizza Crust; its all-natural, gluten free, wheat free, trans-fat free and non-GMO. I love this product because it's delicious and versatile!

## RICE, PASTA & GRAIN SWAPS

- ✓ In place of white pasta, use gluten free brown rice pasta. My favorite is Felicia Bio Brown Rice Pasta.
- ✓ In place of white pasta try gluten free Tinkyada Rice Pasta.
- ✓ In place of white pasta, use whole wheat pasta.
- ✓ In place of white pasta, try zucchini or sweet potato noodles (you'll need a Spiralizer or Zoodler to make zucchini or sweet potato noodles). Check out the Spiralizer here on [Amazon](#). And check out the Zoodler here on [Amazon](#).
- ✓ In place of white pasta, use roasted spaghetti squash for extra fiber, nutrients and less carbs. The flesh when cooked and shredded can take the place of pasta in many dishes. To prepare, cut the squash in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Place the squash cut side down on a non-stick baking sheet. Roast the squash for approximately 40 minutes in a 350 degree oven or until flesh is easily pierced with a fork. Once squash is cool enough to handle, remove the flesh from the skin with a fork. Serve like pasta with your favorite sauce.
- ✓ In place of pasta, use brown rice. I occasionally serve Beef Bolognese or even Chicken Parm over brown rice for a cleaner (less processed) Italian style dinner.
- ✓ When making pasta salad, think of pasta as the garnish, not the main affair. Build your "pasta salad" from mostly fresh veggies or beans (cherry or grape tomatoes, grated carrot, cucumbers, banana peppers, bell peppers, onion, chickpeas, etc.). Gently toss in a small amount of pasta (or one of the gluten free or whole wheat pasta substitutes I mentioned), fresh herbs, seasonings and all-natural dressing. Serve alongside your favorite protein.
- ✓ In place of couscous (which is really just tiny pasta), try quinoa. Quinoa has complete protein, fiber and cancer fighting phytonutrients and flavonoids.
- ✓ Use brown rice or my personal favorite, brown basmati rice, in place of white rice. White rice has no nutritional benefits or fiber but brown rice has both. Try my [Wicked Dirty Brown Rice](#) and you'll become a brown rice believer too.
- ✓ Use quinoa in place of brown rice for a complete protein boost.

- ✓ Use unsweetened oats in place of sugar-laden flavored oatmeal. Sweeten plain oats with pure vanilla, agave nectar or honey and fruit. Old fashioned or steel cut oats are best. Try unsweetened oats in my [Mango, Strawberry and Pistachio Oat Crumble](#).
- ✓ Use [Creamy Cauliflower Puree](#) or pureed parsnips as a reduced-carb substitute for mashed potatoes in any meal or recipe. Check out my [Shepherd's Pie](#) to see how to do it.

## LEANER BEANS

- ✓ In place of refried beans, which are typically prepared in high fat lard, use organic low sodium black beans or pinto beans.
- ✓ Replace the croutons in a salad with crunchy chickpeas like non-GMO, gluten free Saffron Road Crunchy Chickpeas for lots of crunch and added fiber.

## NUT & NUT BUTTER SUBSTITUTES

*Nuts are obviously an awesome source of heart healthy fat, but if you're allergic or just looking to switch it up, try these replacements.*

- ✓ Manitoba Harvest Hemp Hearts Raw Shelled Hemp Seeds are a Vegan complete source of protein with healthy fat, fiber and minerals. Sprinkle on salad, in oatmeal, smoothies, yogurt and baked goods
- ✓ In place of nuts as a crunchy topping, try chia seeds for calcium, complete protein and antioxidants.
- ✓ Swap regular or reduced-fat peanut butter for all natural nut butter (peanut, almond or cashew etc.) The only ingredients should be nuts or nuts and salt. Try all natural peanut butter in my [Spicy Peanut Coconut Sauce](#). Get a taste of all natural almond butter in my [Banana Almond Smoothie](#). And try all natural cashew butter in my [Ginger Lime Lean Green Protein Smoothie](#).
- ✓ In place of nut butter, try Sun Butter or Sunflower Seed Butter. I'll be honest; I personally am not a fan of the flavor of Sun Butter, but a lot of nut-free peeps swear by it.

## SAUCE SWAPS

- ✓ In place of traditional soy sauce, try San-J Organic Tamari Gluten Free Reduced Sodium Soy Sauce.
- ✓ Swap Frank's Red Hot Sauce with Wing Time Hot Buffalo Wing Sauce. It is gluten free, sugar free and preservative free. Try it with my [Buffalo Chicken Tenders](#).
- ✓ If a recipe calls for Sriracha Sauce, try Lee Kum Kee Sriracha Chili Sauce. It is gluten free with no artificial colors or flavors.

- ✓ In place of regular BBQ sauce, try Organicville Original BBQ Sauce; its gluten free and sweetened with Agave nectar instead of sugar.
- ✓ If a recipe calls for tomato sauce, make sure to use a sauce with real tomatoes (not tomato paste) as the first ingredient such as RAO's Homemade Tomato Sauce, Victoria All Natural Tomato Sauce, Pastene "The Chateau Restaurant" Tomato Sauce, Poblano Farm Pasta Sauce or Dave's Gourmet Organic Pasta Sauce.

## OIL SWAPS

- ✓ In place of vegetable oil or canola oil, try flax seed oil, nut oils (like walnut oil), extra virgin olive oil or organic unrefined coconut oil. I regularly use extra virgin olive oil and coconut oil to sauté. Flax oil and nut oils may be too delicate to sauté at high temperatures but are fantastic to make salad dressings or to drizzle over a finished dish.

## COOKING SPRAY SWAPS

***Cooking sprays can really help you to reduce fat and prevent sticking when baking or sautéing. The challenge is most cooking sprays contain chemicals and propellants. The following all-natural cooking sprays are healthier choices and pretty versatile.***

- ✓ In place of traditional cooking spray (like Pam for example), try 365 Everyday Value Brand Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil Cooking Spray. This spray is specific to Whole Foods and contains no additives or propellants. Use generously to prevent sticking.
- ✓ In place of traditional cooking spray try, Bertoli 100% Olive Oil Spray. This brand offers a variety of sprays for different uses such as sautéing, spraying baking pans and even one that you can spray directly on your food. It is propellant and chemical free.
- ✓ In place of traditional cooking spray, try my personal favorite propellant free spray, La Tourangelle 100% Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil Spray.

## BOTTLED SALAD DRESSING SWAP

- ✓ In place of bottled salad dressings which are usually full of hydrogenated fats and artificial ingredients, make your own zesty dressing in minutes! Whisk together minced garlic or shallot, fresh lemon or orange juice, extra virgin olive oil, seasonings and fresh herbs. Mellow the flavor with a drizzle of organic honey or maple syrup. Try my Homemade Apple Vinaigrette in my [Seared Scallops with Carrot Puree and Micro Green Salad](#). This dressing would work beautifully on any salad.

## CHIPS AND SNACK SWAPS

*If you're making a dip and the recipe calls for chips or tortilla chips on the side, skip the unhealthy chips and go for the following options instead.*

- ✓ In place of chips try, Terra Vegetable Chips. They are non-GMO with a ton of gluten free options and made from real, whole vegetables and sweet potatoes. I love the Sweets & Beets and Sweets & Carrots.
- ✓ In place of tortilla chips, try Late July Organic How Sweet Potato It Is Multigrain Tortilla Chips. They are organic and non-GMO and there are a lot of gluten free options.
- ✓ In place of tortilla chips, try Simply Sprouted Way Better Snacks Tortilla Chips. They are gluten free and non-GMO.
- ✓ In place of chips for snacking or croutons on a salad, try Saffron Road Crunchy Chickpeas. They are non-GMO, gluten free, crunchy and delicious.

## BUILD A FAT BLASTING SMOOTHIE

*Smoothies can be really good for you if you know what ingredients to use and how to balance them with the right amount of protein, carbohydrates and fat. The challenge is most people end up adding too much carbs and fat. To build a balanced, fat burning smoothie, choose a quality protein powder, then add a handful of fruit, then a liquid like unsweetened almond milk or coconut milk plus a tablespoon or so of fat like almond butter.*

Here are three balanced, fat blasting smoothies to sample: [My Mom's Fruit and Veggie Smoothie](#) and [Banana Almond Smoothie](#). My [Exclusive Lean Green Protein Smoothie](#) adds greens too!

- ✓ If your smoothie is too sweet, add a spoonful of plain Greek yogurt. The tangy flavor and thick, creamy consistency will help to mellow the flavor.

## DESSERT

*Love dessert? Me too! I have some essential tips I want you to know before you roll up your sleeves and start baking healthy kick a#\$ desserts at home. See, unlike cooking where you can throw in "a little of this and a little of that", baking is a science and each ingredient works in harmony with the other ingredients in fairly specific amounts to create the final product. Keep reading...*

### TIPS:

- When you start swapping one ingredient for another, the end product will no longer have the same outcome as you may expect. But bear with me. In my experience, swapping out unhealthy ingredients like

processed sugar and vegetable oil for natural, unprocessed ingredients is never a bad thing. The end result may be different, but different can be really cool. Not to mention really delicious and good for you too! Luckily, I did a lot of the experimenting for you and shared my results below. Just know that when you start swapping and experimenting, your results will be different based upon what your baking (muffins, cake, brownies, crisps etc.), the altitude, the pan you are using etc. and may just turn out better than you ever expected! A few more tips....

- Stick to one or two healthy swaps per dessert recipe to start. For example, in a homemade brownie recipe, you could swap the processed sugar for organic honey and pureed blackberries and the white flour for a healthier gluten free flour (these swap ideas are listed below). But I wouldn't recommend that you replace a third ingredient your first time making this recipe. Or maybe you swap the butter for coconut oil and the processed white sugar for a combo of coconut sugar and organic honey but you keep the white flour. The trick is to not make too many swaps at once. Figure out what swap is most important health-wise and start there; personally I try to eliminate white sugar and white flour as often as possible.
- If you're hesitant about the outcome of any of the dessert swaps listed below and want to start slow, go with the "half and half" method. For example, if the original recipe calls for white sugar and vegetable oil, swap out half of the white sugar for coconut sugar and/or half of the vegetable oil for healthier mashed banana.
- With all healthy dessert swaps, you may need to adjust the cooking times. To prevent the recipe from drying out or becoming over-cooked, I recommend that you set your timer for 5 minutes sooner than the recipe recommends and add on time from there.
- Most of these swaps work in either store bought dessert mixes or homemade recipes.

## REDUCED FAT DESSERT SWAPS

***The trick when replacing or minimizing the fat in a dessert is to make sure that the dessert still has at least one source of significant fat. Fat provides richness, moisture and what we culinary geeks like to call "mouth feel" (that richness or creaminess you feel on your tongue when eating something made with a lot of fat, like butter for example.) And I'm sure you remember the 90's when the fat free diet craze took over the shelves and everything tasted sort of dry, flat and well, gross? No thanks. In short, keep at least once significant source of fat in the recipe (at least about 7 grams of fat or so per serving), whether it be 3 or more whole eggs or the suggested amount of oil or butter or the fat that naturally occurs in the mix (if you're using a store bought baking mix) etc. You can of course, swap a fat for a heart-healthier source of fat (more on that in the next section.)***

- ✓ Swap vegetable oil or butter for equal parts ripe mashed banana. This swap is awesome because most of us have ripe bananas lying around, plus bananas will impart natural sweetness, flavor and moisture to your dessert.
- ✓ Swap vegetable oil or butter for the same amount of unsweetened apple sauce. Unsweetened apple sauce is very neutral in flavor when used in baked goods. Use it in anything from brownies to cakes and cookies.
- ✓ Swap vegetable oil or butter for equal parts 1% or 2% plain Greek yogurt. Plain Greek yogurt is loaded in protein and adds a lot of moisture to a recipe. Despite being tangy, it's really neutral in flavor when used in baked goods.
- ✓ Swap the cream in a pie (like pumpkin pie) or other dessert, with unsweetened almond milk or coconut milk to shave tons of fat and calories.
- ✓ If a recipe calls for ice cream, try Nice Cream instead! Chop and freeze 4 bananas or use a bag of frozen mango. Puree frozen fruit in a food processor (it won't work in a regular blender) with a splash of coconut or almond milk, organic honey, agave nectar or maple syrup, pure vanilla extract, nuts or berries (if you'd like) until smooth and creamy like ice cream. Swap ice cream in any recipe with this vitamin-rich homemade treat!
- ✓ Forte Gelato is another one of my go-to swaps for ice cream. This creamy all-natural gelato is low in fat and loaded in protein. To order or find it at a location near you, go to [www.tasteforte.com](http://www.tasteforte.com).

### TIPS:

- It's a good idea to match flavors. For example, if replacing oil or butter with one of the non-fat ingredients above, choose the ingredient that goes best with the flavor of the recipe. For example, I might use Greek yogurt in a vanilla cake mix and unsweetened apple sauce or Greek yogurt in a blueberry muffin mix. You could of course use banana in either of these desserts, as long as you're okay with the banana flavor.
- When replacing the fat in a dish with a non-fat ingredient such as mashed banana, Greek yogurt or unsweetened apple sauce, I recommend that you grease the pan or use an all-natural cooking spray (see cooking spray swaps below) to prevent sticking, even if the recipe doesn't call for it.
- When replacing fat with a non-fat ingredient, some recipes work better with the "half and half" method. For example, let's say you were making cookies from scratch and wanted to reduce the fat a bit. Because cookies are small and need to hold their shape without a mold (unlike muffins, bread or brownies), you may want to replace only half of the butter with a non-fat ingredient like unsweetened apple sauce.

## SWAPPING FATS FOR HEALTHIER FATS IN DESSERTS

*Like I mentioned previously, fat can be a great thing. Especially if it's the heart healthy kind of fat that improves your health. These easy swaps will help to keep the moisture, mouth feel and richness of your baked goods while providing your body with the good stuff!*

- ✓ Replace vegetable oil or butter with equal parts mashed or pureed avocado. This swap works beautifully in brownies; no one will ever know it's in there! Just keep in mind that avocado may tint lighter baked goods green (which can be kind of fun if you ask me.)
- ✓ Replace vegetable oil or butter with the same amount of heart healthy coconut oil. Depending on the amount of fat you are replacing, you might get a subtle delicious coconut flavor in the background.
- ✓ Swap shortening for equal amounts of coconut oil in pie crust. I like to brush the edges of the raw pie crust with egg whites to help it brown properly. And because I have found that using coconut oil tends to cause the crust to shrink a bit, I like to fit a piece of foil over the inside of the raw pie shell and fill it with dried beans and pre-bake it to help it keep its shape. I do the dried bean/ pre-bake thing only with pies that do not have crusts on top, like pumpkin pie for example.
- ✓ Replace vegetable oil or butter with walnut oil; it lends a delicious nutty flavor and heart healthy fat that pairs really well with most baked goods.
- ✓ Replace vegetable oil with butter. If you can't tell yet, I'm not a fan of vegetable oil or shortening. But, in my opinion, real butter on occasion as a treat is fine (as long as you're not dairy-free of course.)
- ✓ If a recipe calls for whipped cream, try my luscious [Coconut Creme](#) (made from healthy coconut fat) instead. This makes a delicious and all natural topping for desserts too. Try it on top of my [Mango, Strawberry & Pistachio Oat Crumble](#), or [Skillet Berry Cobbler](#).
- ✓ In place of store-bought frosting, which is loaded in sugar, vegetable oil, corn syrup and artificial ingredients, frost your cake with mouth-watering [Coconut Creme](#) instead. Just quadruple the recipe for a small cake (use 4 cans of coconut milk).
- ✓ If a recipe calls for ice cream, swap it with Luna and Larry's Organic Coconut Bliss Dessert. Its super rich like ice cream but made with all natural coconut milk fat and sweetened with agave nectar instead of white sugar. Find it the ice cream section at your local market.

## SWEETENING DESSERTS WITHOUT WHITE SUGAR

*One of the best swaps you can make in a dessert is replacing processed white sugar (or brown sugar) with a natural sweetener. White sugar is processed and essentially empty calories (basically it does nothing good for your body). It also causes a rapid spike in your blood sugar levels, leading to weight gain and*

**potential disease. The sweetening options listed below have approximately the same amount of calories as white sugar but I prefer them because they are natural. Just remember, even organic and natural sweeteners can still spike blood sugar and cause weight gain in excess. So don't go overboard!**

- ✓ Swap white sugar for organic coconut palm sugar. Coconut palm sugar is a natural sugar from the nectar of the coconut flour and offers small amounts of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Because it's lower on the glycemic index, it causes less of a spike to your blood sugar than traditional white sugar. To me (and this may just be me), coconut sugar lends a subtle coffee flavor in baked goods and desserts which can be really delicious. You can replace white sugar with coconut sugar cup for cup, but I notice when using coconut sugar, the batter tends to thicken and seize up fairly quickly and never gets quite as sweet as I would like. So, I prefer to use a half and half combo of coconut sugar and pureed fruit or honey, maple syrup or agave nectar.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for organic honey. Organic honey is natural, incredibly sweet (so you can usually get away with using a little less than traditional white sugar) and lacks the potential pesticides and contaminants of non-organic honey. Try honey in my [Vanilla & Chocolate Spice Coconut Crème](#).
- ✓ Swap white sugar for organic agave nectar. Agave nectar is the sap from the leaves of the blue agave plant grown in Mexico and is slightly sweeter than white sugar with a mildly burnt flavor. Make sure to purchase organic Agave nectar to avoid any chemical processing. Try agave nectar in my [Mango Strawberry and Pistachio Oat Crumble](#), in my [Cheesecake Custard with Raspberries](#), my [Pumpkin Mocha Custard with Choklat Crunch](#), or my [Skillet Berry Cobbler](#).
- ✓ Swap white sugar for pure organic maple syrup. Organic maple syrup is simply evaporated maple tree sap (unlike imitation maple syrup which is made from corn syrup and food coloring) and contains small amounts of vitamins and minerals. It's neutral in flavor and versatile.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for Medjool dates. Medjool dates are a sticky, delicious, caramel-like dried fruit with small amounts of vitamins and minerals. Puree them in a food processor (a home cook's best friend) with your other dessert ingredients in place of sugar. I love Medjool dates in toppings for crisps and crumbles. Try em' in my [Mango Strawberry and Pistachio Oat Crumble](#).

**Swap pureed fruit for ½ or more of the sugar in a recipe for all natural sweetness, vitamins and fiber. A food processor is an awesome tool for pureeing fruit but you can use a blender too (you may need to add a touch of water if using a blender). When swapping sugar for pureed fruit, I prefer approximately half fruit and half of one of the natural sweeteners listed above (organic honey, agave nectar or maple syrup). The trick is using ripe and super sweet fruit. Also, when combining fruit plus natural sweeteners in a recipe, I typically increase the natural sweetener amount by ½ cup (compared to the amount of sugar the recipe calls for) to achieve my desired sweetness. If you like your desserts less sweet, then just do ½ fruit and ½ natural sweetener to equal the amount of sugar required.**

**Note: if adding a flavored protein powder to your baked goods, you may be able to skip or reduce the amount of natural sweetener (honey, agave, etc.) added, simply because most flavored protein powders are super sweet.**

- ✓ Swap white sugar for mashed banana. Banana will add flavor, sweetness, moisture, vitamins and fiber. You may be able to get away with using banana only as the main sweetener in the recipe depending on your tastes and what you're making. I love using mashed banana in quick breads and muffins. I even use it to sweeten plain oatmeal.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for pureed ripe pears. I use the pear and natural sweetener (honey, agave, etc.) combo in quick breads, muffins and brownies.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for pureed ripe mango. Mango is one of my favorite fruits; it's loaded in vitamins, antioxidants and fiber. I use the mango and natural sweetener (honey, agave, etc.) combo in muffins and quick breads.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for pureed berries (like blackberries). Try this decadent berry pureed with a natural sweetener (honey, agave, etc.) in your next batch of brownies.
- ✓ Swap white sugar for unsweetened apple sauce. It's neutral enough to use in combo with a natural sweetener (honey, agave, etc.) in pretty much any baked good.
- ✓ *Bonus Tip: Try pure vanilla extract (not chemically-processed artificial vanilla extract) to add tons of vanilla flavor and sweetness to your baked goods and desserts; it's virtually calorie free.*

## SWAPPING WHITE FLOUR IN DESSERTS

*I started eliminating white flour years ago. Then I took the next step and went gluten free and I've never looked back. White flour doesn't offer your body any nutrients; it just sort of sits on your hips and belly. Of course, whole wheat flour is better for you because it has fiber, but if you've ever baked or cooked with it then you know how heavy it is. Even if you're not gluten free, the following gluten free flours are amazing, easy to use and many offer vitamins, minerals and fiber. If you love white flour and can't imagine anything different, try the all-purpose gluten free flour blends mentioned below. When baking I typically use a combination of any one of these flours and occasionally I'll use three in one recipe! I find it lightens the texture and flavor of the final product.*

- ✓ In place of white flour, try Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Oat Flour. Try it in my [Mango, Strawberry and Pistachio Oat Crumble](#) and my [Skillet Berry Cobbler](#).
- ✓ In place of white flour, try Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Almond Meal
- ✓ In place of white flour, try Arrowhead Mills Organic Gluten Free Brown Rice Flour
- ✓ In place of white flour, try Namaste Foods Gluten Free Perfect Flour Blend. It's a blend of sweet brown rice flour, tapioca flour, arrowroot flour, sorghum flour and xanthan gum. Plus it is non GMO (it doesn't

contain genetically modified organisms which many experts believe lead to disease), preservative free and contains no gluten, wheat, soy, corn, potato, peanuts, tree nuts, dairy or casein.

- ✓ In place of white flour, try All Natural Cup for Cup Gluten Free Baking Flour. Though it lacks fiber that the other flours provide and contains milk powder, it's an ideal choice if you're looking for a similar taste and texture to white flour. I have found when baking with Cup for Cup, the batter can get really sticky and I always need to add a little extra liquid to the batter.
- ✓ In place of white flour, you can try coconut flour. But I'll be honest; I'm not a fan. I don't like the texture it gives my baked goods so I skip it.
- ✓ Replace some of the flour in a muffin recipe with all natural peanut or almond butter. It adds bulk, structure, flavor and vitamins with no carbohydrates.

## STORE BOUGHT BAKING MIXES THAT DON'T SUCK

***Now you know I'm not a fan of white sugar, but when it comes to a cake mix, that's the least of your problems! Corn syrup, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, and artificial flavors and colors are just a few of the scary ingredients found in most baking mixes, particularly cake mixes. The following baking mixes are all-natural and delicious. And don't forget the swaps you've learned already! For example, instead of adding vegetable oil to these natural cake mixes, try plain Greek yogurt. Or in place of butter use half butter and half unsweetened apple sauce instead.***

- ✓ In place of traditional cake mix, try Cherrybrook Kitchen Gluten Free Wheat Free Cake Mix.
- ✓ In place of traditional cake mix, try Immaculate Cake Scratch Baking Mix.
- ✓ In place of a traditional muffin mix, try Namaste Gluten Free No Sugar Added Muffin Mix. Tip: I added one super sweet pureed mango plus 1 heaping cup of honey to the mix and it was delicious. The instructions do not tell you how much sweetener to use so use the sweetener swaps listed above!
- ✓ In place of Bisquick or a store bought pancake mix, try The Cravings Place All Purpose Pancake & Waffle Mix. It tastes like traditional pancake mix without all of the artificial ingredients. It is gluten free, wheat free, nut free, dairy free and egg free.
- ✓ In place of Bisquick or store bought pancake mix, try Zemas Madhouse Foods Multigrain Pancake, Waffle Mix and More. It is gluten free, vegan and full of hemp, chia seeds and flax meal.

## ADDING PROTEIN TO DESSERTS

***For me, dessert is an indulgence and I create desserts that are both absolutely delicious and nutritious. So, I usually don't worry a ton about balancing my desserts with the right amount of protein, carbohydrates and fat because they are an occasional treat. That being said, because desserts are mostly made of***

*carbohydrates and fat, adding a shot of protein to the mix can help to keep your blood sugar stable so you don't crash.*

- ✓ Add raw shelled hemp seeds to the batter. Hemp seeds are a vegan complete source of protein with healthy fat, fiber and minerals and a nutty flavor. I like Manitoba Harvest Hemp Hearts Raw Shelled Hemp Seeds. You may need to increase the liquid in the batter ever so slightly if adding hemp hearts.
- ✓ Stir your favorite protein powder into the dessert or batter. Just keep in mind that most protein powders will alter the flavor and texture of the final product of a baked good. Try my protein-packed [Cheesecake Custard with Raspberries](#), and my [Pumpkin Mocha Custard with Choklat Crunch](#).

## CHOCOLATE SWAPS

- ✓ When creating chocolate baked goods and desserts, use all natural unsweetened cocoa powder. Then add one of the natural sweeteners listed above. Make sure to skip cocoa mixes or sweetened cocoa to avoid processed white sugar and other unhealthy ingredients.
- ✓ Another option is raw cacao powder, made from cold pressing unroasted cocoa beans. This keeps the enzymes intact. Raw cacao powder is thought to be the healthiest form of cocoa powder. Taste-wise they are similar but raw cacao powder is even higher in antioxidants. It can typically be found in the bulk food section at your local market.
- ✓ Swap regular chocolate chips for all natural, antioxidant-rich raw cacao nibs. Just keep in mind that unlike chocolate chips, they're unsweetened and bitter so you may need to increase the sweetness in the dish elsewhere or use less of them. I occasionally use cacao nibs in cookie dough or as a dessert topping.
- ✓ I also like to swap regular chocolate chips for organic dark chocolate chips or a chopped organic dark chocolate bar. Keep in mind this option will have white sugar.
- ✓ If a recipe calls for chopped chocolate as a topping, try Power Crunch Dark Choklat Protein Energy Bar instead. It's a delicious dark chocolate bar that is cleverly mixed with whey protein crisps (and white sugar) and is sold at many health food stores. Try it in my [Pumpkin Mocha Custard with Choklat Crunch](#).

## RANDOM BUT AWESOME DESSERT TRICKS

- Love pudding? Me too! Instead of boxed pudding mixes which are full of processed white sugar and artificial ingredients, make your own pudding with chia seeds which naturally swell when immersed in liquid while adding complete protein, antioxidants, calcium and fiber. Try my [Exclusive Mango Chia Pudding](#) or the [Chocolate Chia Pudding](#) I created for [Livestrong.com](#).
- A touch of mascarpone cheese (an Italian style cream cheese found at your local market) is absolute heaven in creamy desserts. Plus a little goes a long way so you'll use less than you would actual cream. Try

this trick in my [Pumpkin Mocha Custard with Choklat Crunch](#) and [Cheesecake Custard with Raspberries](#).

- Use pure vanilla extract in place of chemically processed imitation vanilla extract in all of your desserts. You can taste the difference!

## I FREAKIN' LOVE PANCAKES

*I'm a little obsessed with pancakes and feel that they deserve their own special category. Ha! Did you know that traditional pancake and waffle mix has bleached flour, corn syrup solids and hydrogenated fats? No thank you! Try these healthier alternatives instead. And keep an eye out for some amazing pancake recipes coming soon to my website [www.ValerieCogswell.com](http://www.ValerieCogswell.com).*

- ✓ In place of Bisquick or a store bought pancake mix, try The Cravings Place All Purpose Pancake & Waffle Mix. It tastes like traditional pancake mix without all of the artificial ingredients. It is gluten free, wheat free, nut free, dairy free and egg free.
- ✓ In place of Bisquick or store bought pancake mix, try Zemas Madhouse Foods Multigrain Pancake, Waffle Mix and More. It is gluten free, vegan and full of hemp, chia seeds and flax meal.
- ✓ In place of traditional imitation syrup (which oddly enough is not made of maple syrup at all but corn syrup with color and flavor added), try organic pure maple syrup.
- ✓ Swap imitation syrup with homemade berry syrup. Cook fresh or frozen berries in a small pot until heated. Add a drizzle of agave nectar, honey or pure maple syrup to sweeten and a tiny squeeze of fresh lemon juice and pure vanilla extract. Taste and adjust sweetness as necessary.
- ✓ Swap imitation syrup with Homemade Strawberries and Honey Butter. Cook frozen strawberries in a small sauce pot. Add a tablespoon of vegan butter or real butter and organic honey, maple syrup or agave nectar and cook until heated.
- ✓ Instead of imitation syrup, top your pancakes or waffles with a spoonful of Bionaturae Organic Fruit Spread, an all-natural, vitamin-rich fruit spread sweetened with fruit juice instead of sugar.
- ✓ If you haven't heard, the egg and banana pancake is the new "it" breakfast. Blend one whole egg plus one or two egg whites, a ripe banana, a tablespoon of almond butter (optional), a dash of pure vanilla extract, nutmeg, allspice and cinnamon (optional) until smooth. Cook like you would a pancake over medium heat.

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