

WELLNESS STRATEGIES FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING MEDICAL EXPERTS

Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD

FOOD SWAPS ALL THE PLEASURE... NONE OF THE GUILT

The next time you're craving a less-than-healthy treat, such as a plate of pasta or a bowl of ice cream, don't assume that it's off-limits.

There are plenty of good-for-you cooking and baking swaps that don't significantly alter the food's flavor and texture but will up the nutritional ante and save you calories. *My favorites...*

What to skip: Bread crumbs.

Try instead: Seeds.

Good choices: Sesame seeds, chopped pumpkin seeds or chopped sunflower seeds.

Most bread crumbs are nothing more than refined white bread. Coating fish or chicken with seeds delivers more flavor and a satisfying crunch along with healthy types of fat, satiating fiber and protein.

What to do: Sprinkle the seeds on a plate, and dip your fish or chicken in to coat it.

What to skip: Butter.

Try instead: Avocado.

When baking, you can substitute some—but not all—of the butter with puréed avocado. Try a ratio of 70% butter to 30% avocado at first. If the taste and texture are good, work toward a half-and-half mixture. Avocado has the same creamy texture as artery-clogging butter, but one tablespoon of avocado purée has far fewer calories (23 versus 100 calories) and is a good source of

heart-healthy fat and fiber, cancer-fighting folate and blood pressure-regulating potassium.

What to skip: Pasta.

Try instead: Spaghetti squash.

A typical plate of pasta (about three cups) can easily cost you 600 calories, and that's *before* topping it with butter, oil or sauce. One cup (a more appropriate serving size) of spaghetti squash "pasta" has just 42 calories plus fiber and 9% of your daily requirement of vitamin C.

What to do: Slice a spaghetti squash in half, remove the seeds and place flesh side down on a baking sheet with a little water in it. Bake at 375°F for 40 minutes. Remove it from the oven, then with an oven mitt still on to protect your hands from the hot squash, run a fork through the flesh lengthwise—it will naturally separate into pastalike strands. Top it with a marinara sauce and lean ground turkey or chicken.

What to skip: Sour cream.

Try instead: Greek yogurt.

Greek yogurt is essentially yogurt that has been strained to remove much of the liquid and sugar. It has twice as much protein as regular yogurt (for almost the same amount of calories) and less than half as much sugar as regular yogurt. In fact, a six-ounce cup of nonfat Greek yogurt packs in 18 g of protein—almost as much as a small chicken breast! Greek yogurt has a similar look,

taste and consistency to sour cream, which is typically high in saturated fat and low in protein.

What to skip: White or brown rice.

Try instead: Cauliflower "rice."

One cup of medium-grain white rice contains 242 calories with very little fiber (brown rice has 218 calories). The same amount of cauliflower has only 14 calories, plus 22% of your daily need for vitamin K, which helps with blood clotting and bone health. As a cruciferous vegetable, cauliflower is thought to help protect against cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus and stomach.

To make cauliflower "rice": Pulse fresh, raw cauliflower in a food processor until it resembles rice grains. Briefly steam or sauté it.

What to skip: Cream cheese.

Try instead: Puréed cottage cheese.

One tablespoon of cream cheese contains 50 calories and 3 g of saturated fat. For a leaner, higher protein bagel spread or to use on sliced veggies or fruit, try puréeing 1% or 2% milk fat cottage cheese in a blender. It will have a look and consistency that's similar to cream cheese but a slightly saltier flavor. Play up the savory aspect by adding chopped chives, basil and parsley—or go sweeter with a sprinkle of cinnamon. To save on time and effort, use prewhipped cottage cheese.

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What to skip: Ice cream.

Try instead: Frozen banana soft serve.

Frozen bananas, when blended at a high speed, achieve a creamy, ice cream–like consistency.

What to do: Chop a ripe banana into small pieces and freeze in a plastic bag (spread pieces out flat

to avoid a large frozen clump.) The colder the bananas are, the thicker the dessert. Toss frozen pieces in a blender, and add a splash of low-fat milk. Start the blender on low, then do high pulses until the mixture is thick and creamy.

You'll save hundreds of calories (a medium banana has 105 calories...

a cup of premium ice cream has 369), plus it's fat-free and rich in potassium and vitamins C and B-6. Toss in antioxidant-rich blueberries. Or sprinkle with cinnamon—it helps stabilize blood sugar...unsweetened cocoa powder, which is low-calorie...or chopped walnuts for a dose of heart-friendly fats. ■ ■