

A Diabetes Self-Management Book
ALICE MEDRICH



SINFULLY DELICIOUS
**LOW-FAT
DESSERTS**

If desserts were meant to serve a purely nutritional role in our diets, we would not save them for last or use them to reward ourselves for good deeds! If we recognize the importance of a little indulgence in our lives, can we reconcile that with our desire for a healthier diet?

You bet we can! The right philosophy, a few good recipes, and a wise approach to modifying recipes are the keys to success.

Let's start at the beginning...

WHAT ROLE DOES FAT PLAY?

Fat in cakes, filling, and frostings provides moisture, tenderness, creaminess, and blended flavors. Fat provides the texture in certain cakes and the dense, smooth body of some mousses and creams. Fat in desserts may be in the form of butter, shortening, oil, egg yolks, milk products, chocolate, and nuts. Removing fat without understanding how and when to compensate can result in tough, rubbery baked goods, sticky or dry textures, cakes that don't rise properly, cakes that don't taste good, frostings that sag, and mousses that won't set. It can also result in desserts with unbalanced flavors or desserts that are excessively sweet and cloying. The trick to reducing fat in desserts is knowing which fat to reduce, how much to reduce, and whether to compensate in any way for the fat that is removed.

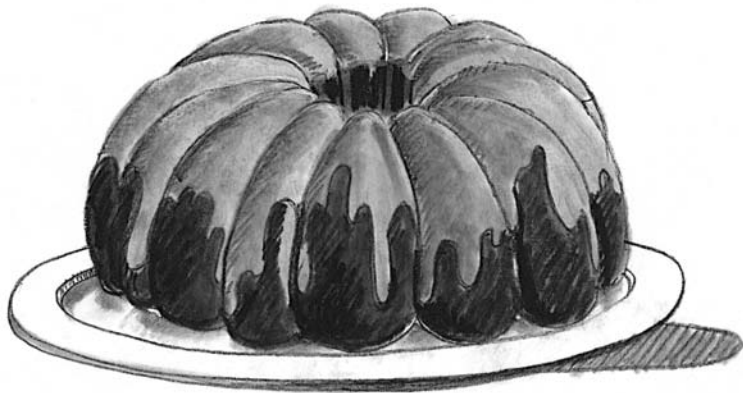
WHAT ABOUT FAT AND FLAVOR?

Fat “carries” and “fixes” flavors. It also mutes and softens flavors—which is probably why it marries and blends them so effectively. But at high levels, fat actually obscures flavor. In the most successful reduced-fat recipes, you can actually taste purer, cleaner flavors—especially as you grow accustomed to less fat.

Fearing a loss of flavor in low-fat dishes, many chefs compensate with a “high flavor strategy,” using aromatics, chilies, spices, citrus juice, and assertive ingredients to spike leaner dishes with lots of flavor. In dessert making, this can backfire. Without the fat to soften, blend, and marry these flavors, they can overwhelm a low-fat dessert and make it taste unbalanced or incomplete. For that reason, I use strong accent flavors with great care so that they remain very understated and soft.

Low-fat chocolate desserts offer one of the best illustrations of this philosophy. Low-fat recipes cannot afford much chocolate in the first place; too much chocolate means too much fat. To get lots of chocolate flavor without the fat, I use cocoa or a combination of chocolate and cocoa. But the chocolate flavor in a low-fat dessert can easily be upstaged by strong accent flavors (spices, mint, citrus, liquors, for instance). So to keep a low-fat chocolate dessert tasting ultra chocolaty, keep competing flavors very much in the background.

All the principles described above are incorporated in the recipes that follow. I hope you enjoy making these recipes. I certainly had fun writing them and tasting the results!



DEVIL'S FOOD CAKE WITH CHOCOLATE GLAZE

This cake is as tender and chocolaty as traditional devil's food, and it is good enough to serve plain, without glaze or frosting. For a three-layer cake, divide the batter among three 8-inch round pans and bake only 25 to 30 minutes.

Makes 24 servings. Best baked one day ahead.

Cake:

2 cups all-purpose flour
 2/3 cup unsweetened Dutch process cocoa powder
 Scant 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 Scant 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 2 eggs
 4 egg whites
 2 tablespoons instant coffee
 3 tablespoons hot water
 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 3/4 cup low-fat buttermilk, at cool room temperature
 12 tablespoons unsalted butter
 2 teaspoons grated orange zest
 1 1/3 cups granulated sugar
 1 1/3 cups packed light or dark brown sugar

Glaze:

1/2 cup granulated sugar
 1/4 cup unsweetened Dutch process cocoa powder
 1/2 cup low-fat evaporated milk
 1 1/2 ounces chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

Equipment:

12-cup decorative tube pan or bundt pan
 Mixer, preferably on a stand

1. To make the cake: Have ingredients at room temperature (68°–70°F). Position rack in lower third of oven and preheat to 350°F. Coat pan with vegetable oil spray.

2. Combine and sift together flour, cocoa, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Set aside. Whisk whole egg with egg whites in a small bowl. Set aside. Dissolve coffee powder in water and combine with vanilla and buttermilk in a measuring cup or bowl.

3. Cut butter into chunks and place in an electric mixer bowl with orange zest. Beat to soften butter, about a minute. Add the granulated sugar and brown sugar gradually, beating constantly for a total of about 3 minutes at medium speed. Dribble beaten eggs into sugar mixture gradually, beating at medium-high speed for a total of 2 to 3 minutes. On low speed, beat in one-third of the flour mixture, scraping the bowl as necessary. On medium speed, gradually dribble in half of the buttermilk mixture, scraping the bowl as necessary. On low speed, beat in half of the remaining flour mixture, followed by the rest of the buttermilk, always scraping the bowl as necessary. On low speed, beat in remaining flour mixture until well combined.

4. Scrape batter into prepared pan and smooth top. Bake 45 to 50 minutes or until cake starts to shrink from sides of pan and a toothpick plunged into the center comes out barely clean. Do not overbake. Cool cake, in the pan, on a wire rack for 5 to 10 minutes.

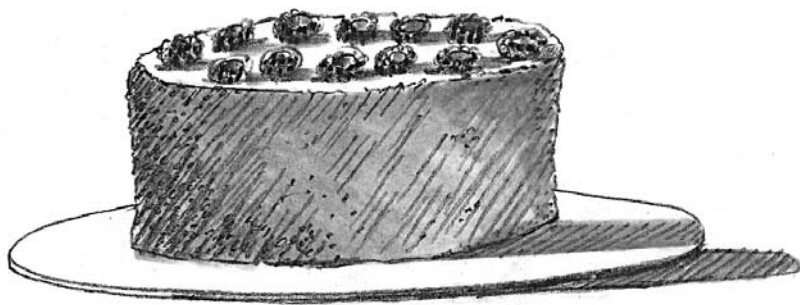
5. To make the glaze: In a small, heavy-bottom saucepan, combine sugar with cocoa. Use a wooden spoon to stir in just enough evaporated milk to form a smooth paste, then stir in the remaining evaporated milk. Cook over medium heat until mixture simmers and then begins to boil, stirring constantly and scraping the sides and bottom edges of the saucepan religiously. Boil gently for a full 2 minutes, stirring constantly to prevent burning. Off heat, stir in chopped chocolate and vanilla. Cool until thickened. Spoon glaze over cake, leaving some of the cake bare. *This cake will keep several days. It freezes well, too, but it's best when baked one day ahead of serving.*

Per serving:

Calories: 194
 Carbohydrate: 30 g
 Protein: 3 g
 Fat: 6 g
 Saturated fat: 4 g
 Cholesterol: 34 mg
 Dietary fiber: trace
 Sodium: 109 mg

Exchanges:

2 carbohydrate
 1 fat
 Carbohydrate Choices: 2



RASPBERRY VANILLA CHEESECAKE

Here's one that's everybody's favorite. It has to chill at least 12 hours before serving, so make it a day ahead.

Serves 12

- 2 cups low-fat (2%) small-curd cottage cheese, drained at least 30 minutes in a strainer set over a bowl in the refrigerator
- 8 ounces Neufchâtel cream cheese (Kraft in the box is good—don't buy the kind in the tub)
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1½ teaspoons strained lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 3–4 tablespoons Chocolate Espresso Cookie (see recipe on page 8), graham cracker or zwieback crumbs
- 2 cartons (10–12 ounces) fresh raspberries
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar, optional for sprinkling

Equipment:

- 8-inch round cake pan with a solid bottom (not springform), at least 2 inches deep
- Ovenproof baking dish or skillet, at least 11 inches in diameter and 2 inches deep
- 8-inch cardboard cake circle or pan bottom (optional)

1. Position rack in lower third of oven and preheat to 350°F. Place a round of parchment paper in the bottom of the cake pan, and spray sides of pan with vegetable oil spray. Put water kettle on to boil for step 5.

2. Process the cottage cheese in a food processor for 2½ to 3 minutes or until silky smooth, scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl once or twice as necessary. Set aside.

3. In a small microwave-safe bowl, soften the Neufchâtel cheese in a microwave oven on High for about 30 seconds, or warm gently in the top of a double boiler. Stir until smooth. Scrape into the food processor with the cottage cheese. Add the sugar, eggs, vanilla, lemon juice, and salt. Pulse until incorporated and perfectly smooth. Do not overprocess.

4. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Level the surface if necessary.

5. Slide the oven rack partway out. Put cake pan in baking dish or skillet and place on the oven rack. Carefully pour boiling water around the pan to a depth of about 1 inch. Slide oven rack in gently to avoid sloshing. Bake until cheesecake has puffed and risen slightly and is just beginning to shrink from the edges of the pan, about 40 to 45 minutes. Remove cheesecake from water bath and cool on a rack. *When completely cool, cover and chill for at least 12 hours or up to two days before serving.*

6. **To unmold and serve:** Cover the pan with tightly stretched plastic wrap. Place a flat dish on top of plastic wrap. Invert pan and dish and rap pan gently until cheesecake releases from pan. Remove pan and peel parchment liner from bottom of cake. Place cake circle or serving plate on the cake and carefully invert so that cake is right side up. Remove plastic wrap. Press crumbs around sides of cake. Arrange raspberries over the top of the cake and sieve powdered sugar very lightly over the top. Cut with a sharp thin knife. Dip the knife in hot water and wipe it dry between cuts.

Tips:

The smooth texture of this cheesecake relies on ultrasoft cottage cheese. This requires a food processor and at least 2½ to 3 minutes of processing—no cheating.

Once the Neufchâtel cheese has been added, pulse only enough to incorporate. Overprocessing thins the batter.

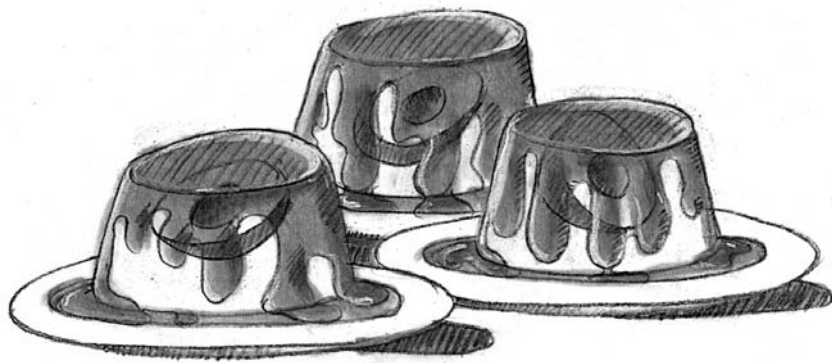
If you use nonfat cottage cheese instead of low-fat, the results will be not be nearly as good and you will save only about 0.4 grams of fat per serving. It's not worth it.

Per serving:

Calories: 189
 Carbohydrate: 16 g
 Protein: 9 g
 Fat: 6 g
 Saturated fat: 4 g
 Cholesterol: 71 mg
 Dietary fiber: 2 g
 Sodium: 292 mg

Exchanges:

1 carbohydrate
 1 very lean meat
 1 fat
 Carbohydrate Choices: 1



APRICOT CREME CARAMEL

Steeping milk in aromatics gives these little dinner-party desserts a subtle sophistication, evoking memories of much richer custards. They are quite pretty, too. Find the softest apricot halves possible so that you can use them whole.

Makes 6 servings

6 very soft, moist, dried apricot halves
 3–4 tablespoons rum
 3 cups low-fat (1%) milk
 ½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise
 2-inch stick of cinnamon
 Strips of lemon zest from one-fourth of a medium lemon
 ½ cup plus ¼ cup granulated sugar
 ¼ cup packed brown sugar
 2 whole eggs
 2 egg whites

Special equipment:

Six 5-ounce soufflé or custard cups
 Baking dish large enough to fit the six cups

1. Soak apricots in enough rum to cover for 30 minutes or until needed. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. In a medium saucepan, bring milk to a simmer with vanilla bean, cinnamon stick, and lemon zest. Lower heat and keep just below the simmer for about 15 minutes to infuse the milk with flavor.
3. Meanwhile, line the cups with caramel: In a 3- to 4-cup saucepan, combine ½ cup of the granulated sugar with ¼ cup of water. Stir to moisten the sugar. Cover and bring to a simmer. Uncover and wash down any sugar crystal clinging to sides of pan

with a pastry brush or paper towel dipped in water. Increase heat and simmer uncovered without stirring until syrup begins to color. Watch saucepan carefully, swirling it from time to time until syrup turns a medium-dark amber color. (It is easiest to judge the color if you drip a few drops onto a white plate).

4. Quickly pour an equal quantity of caramel into each soufflé cup. Tilt each cup to spread caramel all over the bottom of each cup. Drain apricots, reserving liquid for another use. If the apricots are very soft, place a whole half in the center of the caramel in each cup. (If the apricots seem a little firm, cut or dice them before adding to the cups). Place the cups in baking dish and set aside. Put a kettle of water on to boil.

5. Beat eggs and egg whites with the remaining ¼ cup of granulated sugar and the brown sugar until well combined. Strain milk mixture to remove vanilla bean, cinnamon stick, and lemon zest. Gradually whisk hot milk into the egg mixture. Strain again to eliminate foam, and pour into caramel-lined cups up to ¼ inch from the rim. Pour boiling water into baking dish until it reaches halfway up the sides of the cups.

6. Bake until knife inserted in to the centers of each custard comes out clean, about 35 to 40 minutes. Custards will still seem very liquid when the cups are tapped; don't worry. Remove cups from the water and cool on a rack until room temperature. Refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight before serving.

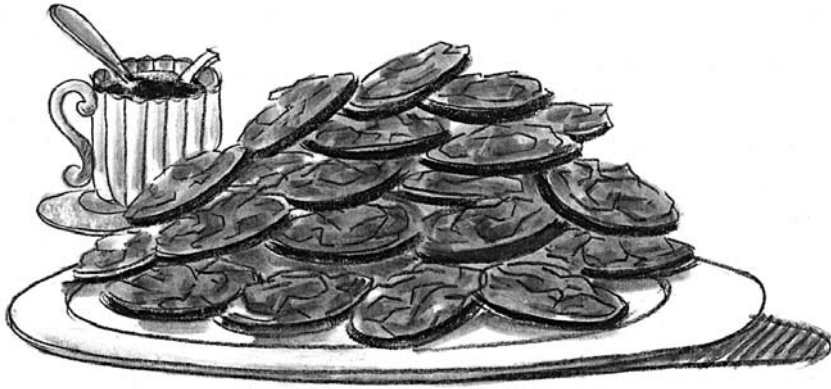
7. To serve, run a knife around the edge of each custard to loosen it. Tilt back and forth until custard begins to slide in the sauce, then invert onto individual serving plates. Use a small rubber spatula to scrape any leftover caramel sauce from the cups onto the custards. (To retrieve even more caramel sauce, divide the rum left from soaking the apricots among the cups and set them in a skillet of simmering water to melt. Scrape the melted sauce over the custards). *Serve immediately or chill until needed.*

Per serving:

Calories: 219
 Carbohydrate: 32 g
 Protein: 7 g
 Fat: 3 g
 Saturated fat: 1 g
 Cholesterol: 76 mg
 Dietary fiber: trace
 Sodium: 96 mg

Exchanges:

2 carbohydrate
 ½ fat
 Carbohydrate Choices: 2



CHOCOLATE ESPRESSO COOKIES

These thin, crisp cookies are deliciously spiked with espresso flavor. For a chewy consistency, slice them a little thicker and bake them a little less. The combination of margarine and butter makes for a flavorful, tender cookie.

Makes 40–45 cookies

1 cup all-purpose flour
½ cup unsweetened Dutch Process cocoa powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup brown sugar
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1½ tablespoons powdered instant espresso
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, slightly softened
3 tablespoons stick margarine
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 egg white

Equipment:

Several baking sheets

1. Mix flour, cocoa, baking soda, and salt in a medium bowl. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, granulated sugar, and coffee. Mix with fingers to press out lumps.
3. In a medium mixing bowl, beat butter and margarine together until creamy. Add the sugar mixture and vanilla extract. Beat on high speed for about one minute. Beat in egg white. On low speed, beat in flour mixture just until incorporated. Knead with hands briefly until smooth.
4. Form dough into a neat cylinder 9–10 inches long and about 1¾ inches in diameter. Wrap securely in waxed paper. Chill at least 45 minutes or until needed. *Dough can be prepared to this point and refrigerated up to three days, or it can be wrapped, airtight, and frozen up to three months.*
5. **To bake cookies:** Place oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of oven and preheat to 350°F. Use a sharp knife to slice rounds a scant ¼ inch thick from the chilled dough. Place one inch apart on prepared baking sheets. Bake 10 to 14 minutes. Rotate baking sheets from top to bottom and front to back about halfway through baking to ensure even baking. Cookies will puff and crackle on top and then begin to settle down slightly when done. Transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool completely before storing or stacking. *Store, airtight, up to two weeks, or freeze up to two months.*

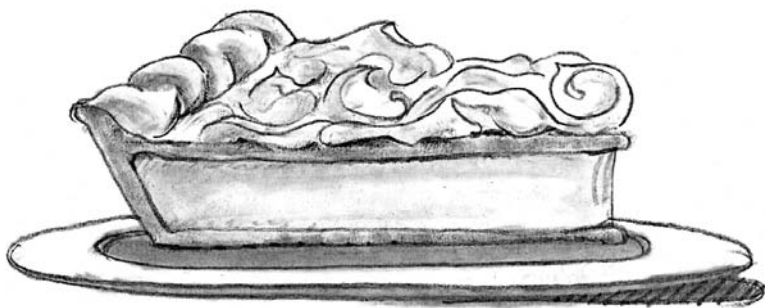
Serving size: 1 cookie

Per serving:

Calories: 46
Carbohydrate: 5 g
Protein: trace
Fat: 3 g
Saturated fat: 1 g
Cholesterol: 7 mg
Dietary fiber: trace
Sodium: 40 mg

Exchanges:

½ carbohydrate
½ fat
Carbohydrate Choices: ½



LEMON MERINGUE PIE

Old-fashioned lemon meringue pie filling is easy and can be made in advance. Ditto the flaky phyllo pie crust. Assemble all and toast the meringue shortly before serving. To be safe from salmonella bacteria, the meringue pie topping is precooked before it is spread on the pie. A brief stay in a hot oven simply browns the meringue without further cooking.

Serves 10.

Filling:

2 eggs
¼ cup cornstarch
¼ cup cake flour
¼ teaspoon salt
1¼ cups sugar
1½ cups water
Grated zest of 3 large lemons
½ cup fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons sweet butter

Phyllo pie shell:

6 phyllo sheets (12" × 17" or 14" × 18"), defrosted
2 tablespoons clarified butter

Meringue:

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
3 teaspoons water
3 egg whites
7 tablespoons sugar

Special equipment:

9-inch glass pie plate
Instant-read thermometer
A foil-wrapped square or round of cardboard about the size of the pie plate

1. To make filling: In a small bowl, whisk eggs until yolks and whites are well combined. Set aside.

2. Combine cornstarch, flour, salt, and sugar in a heavy two-quart saucepan. Stir in enough of the water to form a smooth paste, then slowly add remaining water. Cook and stir over medium-high heat until mixture just begins to bubble at the edges. Continue to cook, stirring constantly for 2 more minutes. Take off heat, stir in lemon zest, lemon juice, and butter. Whisk about ½ cup of hot mixture into the eggs, whisking to prevent eggs from scrambling. Scrape egg mixture back into saucepan and cook over medium heat until mixture just begins to bubble at the edges again. Cook, stirring constantly for an additional minute. Turn mixture into a clean shallow bowl. *Use as soon as cool or refrigerate several hours until needed. Filling may be completed and refrigerated up to one day in advance.*

3. To make phyllo pie shell: Unroll and stack defrosted phyllo sheets on a tray. If you are using the larger-size phyllo sheets, trim about 2 inches off the width only; discard trimming. Cover closely with plastic wrap and cover the plastic wrap with a damp towel. (Be careful that the damp towel never comes in direct contact with phyllo sheets or they will dissolve into paste.)

4. Melt clarified butter if it has cooled. Place one sheet of phyllo on a dry pastry board or on the counter in front of you (always keep the remaining sheets under wraps until needed). Transfer one teaspoon of clarified butter to a small cup. Use a pastry brush to cover the phyllo sheet evenly and completely with the teaspoon of butter. Cut the buttered phyllo in half; place one half into the pie pan and the second on top of it, rotated a few degrees so that the corners are offset. Remove a second sheet of phyllo from the pile. Butter it and cut it in half. Place one half at a time in the pie pan, rotating each from the one below it. Continue to prepare, cut, and line the pan with the remaining four phyllo sheets. You will have 12 overlapping layers in the pie plate. Overhanging points can be adjusted attractively, or folded under a bit, or trimmed. *Lined pan can be wrapped carefully and refrigerated up to a day in advance of baking, if desired.*

5. To bake: Position oven rack in lower third of oven and preheat to 375°F. Prick bottom of pastry with a fork. Place a square of waxed paper or foil in the bottom of the lined pan and place a small (6- or 7-inch) cake pan on the paper to weight the pastry. Bake 6 minutes. Remove weight and paper and continue to bake another 8 to 10 minutes, watching carefully, until nicely browned all over. (If pastry puffs up, prick again and push down with the cake pan that was used as a weight). I like well-browned

pastry, even at the expense of a little scorching around the top edges, which can easily be broken off later. A glass pie plate enables me to check the browning on the bottom. Cool crust completely, on a rack, before using. *Cooled crust can be wrapped and stored, at room temperature, up to one day ahead.*

Up to two hours before serving, make meringue topping, assemble pie, and brown the meringue

6. To make meringue topping: Bring one inch of water to a simmer in a large skillet. Combine the cream of tartar and water in a 6- to 8-cup heatproof bowl. Whisk in the egg whites and sugar. Place the thermometer near the stove in a mug of just-boiled water. Set the bowl of egg whites in the skillet and beat on low speed with a hand-held electric mixer until the egg whites reach 140°F. Increase speed and continue to beat either 5 minutes or until the thermometer registers 160°F, whichever happens first*! (Do not stop beating as long as the bowl is in the skillet, or the egg whites will be overcooked). Remove the bowl from the skillet and continue to beat at high speed until cool and stiff.

* If the mixture remains at or over 140°F for 5 minutes, it need not reach 160°F.

7. To assemble pie and brown the top: Without mixing or beating, spoon the cool or chilled lemon filling into the cooled pie shell. Use a large, clean spoon to cover the filling with large dollops of meringue. Be sure that the meringue touches the phyllo crust all around the edges, sealing in the filling. Use the back of the spoon to swirl the meringue attractively and make sure that no filling shows through. Place the pie on the foil-wrapped cardboard (which will insulate the bottom of the pie and keep the filling from heating up) on a cookie sheet. Slide everything into the oven and bake 3 to 5 minutes, watching carefully, to brown the edges and tips of the meringue swirls. *Pie can be served immediately or cooled on a rack and then chilled first. Serve within two hours for the crispest pastry.*

Per serving:

Calories: 218
Carbohydrate: 28 g
Protein: 5 g
Fat: 9 g
Saturated fat: 4 g
Cholesterol: 56 mg
Dietary fiber: trace
Sodium: 109 mg

Exchanges:

2 carbohydrate
2 fat
Carbohydrate Choices: 2



ICED MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE

This lightly spiced, refreshing spoon drink is like a sophisticated slushy. Serve in a frosted goblet with a stick of cinnamon.

Makes 7 servings

½ cup unsweetened Dutch process cocoa powder
¾ cup sugar
⅛ teaspoon grated orange zest
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
Good pinch of ground cayenne pepper
Good pinch of ground black pepper
1½ teaspoons instant espresso powder (optional)
2½ cups low-fat (2%) milk
¼ cup water or cold coffee

1. In a small saucepan, combine cocoa powder, sugar, flavorings, and enough of the milk to form a smooth paste, then stir in the rest of the milk. Stir over low heat until mixture is warm and sugar is dissolved.

2. Pour into shallow pan or ice cube tray and freeze hard, several hours, or overnight.

3. Break up frozen mixture in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Process with the water or cold coffee until smooth and lightened in color. *Serve at once in frosted goblets as a spoon drink. Or scrape into a bowl and freeze; scoop and serve frozen.*

Per serving:

Calories: 145
Carbohydrate: 20 g
Protein: 7 g
Fat: 2 g
Saturated fat: 1 g
Cholesterol: 6 mg
Dietary fiber: 0 g
Sodium: 44 mg

Exchanges:

1 carbohydrate
½ low-fat milk
Carbohydrate Choices: 1

TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING YOUR LOW-FAT DESSERT REPERTOIRE

First, let someone else do the work! Probably the first and smartest bit of advice is to take advantage of someone else's hard work. When you find low-fat and reduced-fat recipes that are delicious, that work for you, and are hailed by family and friends, by all means use them as models. Improvise on them and try your own variations and flavors within the basic structure of the recipe. Someone else—a professional baker, food scientist, or chef—took the time and trouble to figure out the hard part, like how to keep the cookie tender, the cake moist, or the frosting creamy. You get to enjoy the results and play the variations. Before you know it, you will have your own repertoire of healthy dessert recipes.

Keep ingredient quality and standards high. Don't let making desserts with lower fat turn into a chemistry experiment. Keep your standards high by using high-quality ingredients. Read labels, and trust the instincts that normally guide your shopping and eating. The desire to reduce the fat in your recipes shouldn't drive you to use low-fat or nonfat ingredients loaded with chemicals, preservatives, unrecognizable additives, or ingredients that don't taste good. Concern about food additives aside, ingredients with poor flavor are even more noticeable in lower-fat desserts than in very rich ones because, among other things, fat helps to marry and blend flavors. Recipes with less fat are less forgiving, so an undesirable flavor is less likely to be masked or blended with other flavors.

When choosing dairy products, select carefully among the low-fat and nonfat products. In the case of cottage cheese, sour cream, and cream cheese, you may find that low-fat products taste better and have fewer additives than nonfat products.

Cocoa and chocolate must be used in small quantities in low-fat recipes. Premium domestic brands or imported brands of bitter-sweet and semisweet chocolate will give you more chocolate flavor per ounce than the semisweet and bittersweet chocolate “baking squares” that you find in the supermarket. The best quality really does pay off.

Use all techniques judiciously. Sooner or later, you will strike out on your own and attempt to reduce some of the fat in your old favorites—desserts that you've always loved and still do, or desserts that have begun to taste a little too rich and heavy to the enlightened palate. Because there are so many different types of dessert recipes, and so many different techniques for making them, there is no single set of rules for reducing fat without ruining recipes. The techniques presented here are great guidelines, but not silver bullets, so use them judiciously. Techniques that work for some types of recipes do not work for others. Even for the professional, there is no substitute for a certain amount of trial and error.

Easy does it! Unless you are willing to throw away a lot of experiments, start slowly. If the recipe calls for eight ounces of butter, try using six or seven. Instead of four whole eggs, try two whole eggs and two egg whites. Instead of whole milk, use low-fat. Consider each dessert a work in progress—if it is still good with a little fat

removed, you might try removing a little more the next time. Above all, if you plan to eat and enjoy these desserts-in-progress, never make enormous changes or change too many things at once. Drastic changes yield inedible desserts! Failures that result from too many changes at once cannot teach you which changes work and which do not. In my experience, it is often possible to ease up to 25 percent or even 30 percent of the fat out of desserts by taking it slow and easy, without adverse effects and without having to “compensate” or substantially revise the formula of a recipe.

Swap egg whites for egg yolks. This is a good technique when applied with moderation. If you literally replace every yolk with an egg white, your cake or cookies are likely to be tough, your custards may weep moisture, your chocolate mousses will surely disappoint, and the only good use you'll find for your cakes is as doorstops. While egg whites and yolks both function to leaven, moisten, and give structure to baked goods, they are fundamentally different substances. Egg whites are protein; too many of them toughens baked goods, especially in the absence of yolks. Egg yolks are fat; they tenderize, emulsify, and moisten. Do not automatically eliminate all of the yolks from your recipes. Keep a yolk or two for the texture and flavor that they contribute. If a recipe calls for four eggs, try using two whole eggs and two whites; it's usually a good substitute.

Replace butter with fruit puree. Fruit purees such as applesauce or strained prunes can provide moisture and tenderness to compensate for a reduction in butter or other fat in a recipe. This technique is most successful when the flavors and textures in the recipe are already compatible with the addition of fruit—such as a spice loaf, carrot cake, gingerbread, or quick bread with other fruit in it—so there is no need to cover up additional fruit flavor. Attempting to cover the flavor of an ingredient that was added for reasons other than flavor results in a muddy taste. You will get the very best results if you leave a little of the butter or fat in the recipe along with the added fruit puree. Problems usually occur when we approach fat reduction as an all-or-nothing proposition.

Is cake flour better than all-purpose flour? Cake flour produces more tender cakes than all-purpose flour. Since we need all the tenderness we can get in cakes with reduced fat, it stands to reason that replacing all-purpose with cake flour might be a good technique. To know whether this technique really works for a specific recipe, the substitution should be made ounce for ounce, rather than cup for cup, since cake flour weighs less than all-purpose. For purposes of comparison, one cup of sifted all-purpose flour should be replaced with 1 cup plus 2½ tablespoons sifted cake flour. Cake flour will produce a cake with greater volume and more tenderness, but all-purpose flour produces cakes with more flavor. You may prefer the more tender cake in recipes with lots of chocolate or spices, and you may prefer the more flavorful all-purpose flour in a plain cake. Hey, did we say there were easy answers?

Must we replace fat? One of the biggest fallacies, and the most fun to debunk, is the concept that fat removed from a recipe must be replaced by something. Do not feel obliged to add something back

to the recipe to compensate for small quantities of fat eliminated. If you simply remove one egg yolk from a recipe, or a little of the butter, there is no need to “replace” it. If you substitute low-fat milk for whole milk, there is no need to compensate. This is especially true if you are making slow and gradual changes, where the point is to see how much fat you can ease out of a recipe without destroying its pleasurable qualities. Once you have crossed the line and the dessert is disappointing, consider adding back a bit of the fat, or finding some other ways of compensating for the qualities that the fat contributed in the first place. Read on for ideas on how to compensate for fat reductions.

Budget the fat and juggle the ingredients. All fats are not equal in their contribution to an individual recipe, and most recipes have at least two or three sources of fat. Sometimes the key to success is knowing which fat to remove and which to retain. Chocolate dessert recipes provide a good example. If you want a chocolate dessert to be as chocolaty as possible but lower in fat, eliminate fats other than chocolate. You might reduce butter, egg yolks, and cream. If the fat in the chocolate is still too much, you can trade some of the chocolate for cocoa, since cocoa boosts and reinforces the flavor or chocolate while adding relatively little fat. But adding cocoa is also a bit of a challenge: Since cocoa is dry and bitter, you might need to compensate by adding sugar and some kind of moisture such as water, milk, or coffee.

If you reduce or eliminate whipped cream in mousse recipes, you may miss the volume, airy texture, and creaminess that it provides. You can compensate by folding in a little Safe Meringue (see page 18).

Make it pretty! Low-fat recipes have a bad reputation. Many people think they are good enough for the family but too homey for company. If you can make your recipes taste good enough for company, you can certainly present them as elegantly and artfully as you do other desserts. Serving dessert on a beautiful plate or using a pretty stencil for dusting powdered sugar on a cake can contribute a lot to the enjoyment of a good dessert.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Reducing the fat in desserts is a challenge, and the road to success is paved with—well, cakes suitable for paving stones. Some of the following troubleshooting tips may help you achieve success a little less painfully.

Tough cookies: If you like crisp cookies but find them tough when fat is removed, here are a few tricks. Substitute margarine or shortening for one-third to one-half of the butter in the recipe. Cream the fat and sugar extra long for extra lightness. Adding a little leavening such as baking powder or soda to cookie dough can transform a crisp, hard cookie into a crisp, tender cookie by aerating the structure. Make crisp cookies thin rather than thick; thin, crisp cookies are perceived as tender, but thick, crisp cookies seem hard. Acidic dairy products are legendary tenderizers, so try a tablespoon or two of nonfat yogurt in a cookie batter. As always, do not try all of these techniques at once.

Tough or heavy cakes: If a cake is mixed by the creaming method (the fat is beaten together with the sugar to lighten the mixture), take extra time to beat the butter and sugar since this is a part of the leavening or aeration process that traditionally yields the best cake textures. While extra beating is good for sugar and butter, even an ultra-rich butter cake will get tough if the batter is overbeaten after the flour is added (if in doubt, stir or fold the flour in by hand). You can lighten some cake batters by beating some of the egg whites with a little of the sugar until you get stiff but not dry peaks, then folding this mixture into the batter at the end. You can also try the cake-flour swap described on page 15 or add a little fruit puree to the batter.

Mousses and creams that won't set: Gelatin or starch can provide some stiffness or body in mousses, creams, fillings, and frostings that go limp from fat reduction. If you miss the fluffy, creamy qualities of whipped cream, you can fold in a little Safe Meringue (see page 18).

Dry or sticky baked goods: Fat-reduced recipes are more fragile and less forgiving than fat-rich recipes. They are especially sensitive to baking time and temperatures. A minute or two extra in the oven can produce a dry cake. Without the extra moisture from fat, the baker has less leeway. Conversely, a couple of minutes of underbaking can result in a cake with a sticky texture, especially in a recipe where fruit puree was substituted for some of the fat. While much of our family cooking tolerates oven inaccuracies of 25 degrees to 50 degrees in either direction, baking is less forgiving and low-fat baking is even touchier. Get your oven calibrated or use an oven thermometer to check accuracy; use a timer and extra patience in watching for that moment of doneness.

Low-fat desserts that are too sweet: When fat is removed from a dessert, excessive sweetness may be one of the side effects. There are two reasons for this, and they make perfect sense. First, when you remove some of the ingredients in a recipe (in this case the fat) without changing the sugar, the percentage of sugar compared with the other ingredients becomes higher. Second, just as fat mellows other strong flavors, fat mellows the sweetness of sugar, so reducing the fat “unleashes” the sugar and makes it more potent. The remedy is to remove a little sugar when you reduce the fat. Do this only after tasting, however, since it is not always necessary.

Now that you know the solution to this problem, you may wonder why commercial low-fat products are still too sweet. There are several reasons. Sugar adds moisture and tenderness to baked goods, thus increasing the shelf life. Sweetness also helps to cover up the flavors of additives or artificial ingredients, and sugar makes people, especially children, think that they are eating dessert. Sugar also provides lots of calories without fat, and this reduces the calculated percentage of calories from fat, which looks good on the label (but not so good around your waist). These are all compelling reasons to make low-fat desserts at home, where you can control the quality and enjoy your dessert while it is still fresh and moist without added sugar.

SAFE MERINGUE

Meringue is a versatile ingredient in low-fat baking and dessert making. It provides a creamy, fluffy texture without fat. It can be used to replace some of the whipped cream in a mousse, and it can be used as a traditional pie topping or as a cake frosting slipped briefly into a hot oven to toast. Our need to avoid salmonella prevents our using meringue in uncooked or partially cooked applications such as these unless the meringue can be heated to 160°F or held at or above 140°F for 5 minutes.

My method for making safe meringue relies on the use of a hand-held electric mixer, a skillet of barely simmering water to serve as a water bath, and an instant-read thermometer kept near the stove in a mug of boiling water so that it can be rinsed in water hotter than 160°F in between readings. Before they are heated, the egg whites are combined with water, cream of tartar, and sugar to prevent the proteins in the eggs whites from cooking at too low a temperature. The bowl of egg whites is placed in the skillet and the egg whites are beaten constantly until they reach 160°F or remain above 140°F for 5 minutes, whichever happens first. The egg whites are removed from the heat and beaten at high speed until cool and stiff. This method works best with at least two egg whites and two tablespoons of sugar per egg white (the sugar can be reduced a little when you make larger batches). If only a single-egg-white meringue is needed (about 1 to 1½ cups), make a two-egg-white recipe and use only half of the results. A three-egg-white version appears as part of the Lemon Meringue Pie recipe (page 10).

½ teaspoon cream of tartar	2 teaspoons water
2 egg whites	¼ cup sugar

Equipment:

Hand-held electric mixer
Instant-read thermometer

Heat one inch of water in a large skillet, and adjust heat so that it barely simmers. Combine the cream of tartar and water in a 4- to 6-cup heatproof bowl, preferably stainless steel. Whisk in the egg whites and sugar. Place the thermometer near the stove in a mug of just-boiled water. Set the bowl of egg whites in the skillet and beat on low speed with a handheld electric mixer until the egg whites reach 140°F (since the thermometer is kept in hotter water, the needle will adjust downward). Replace the thermometer in the hot water in between readings. Increase speed and continue to beat either 5 minutes or until the thermometer registers 160°F, whichever happens first*! (Do not stop beating while the bowl is in the skillet, or the egg whites will be overcooked.) Remove the bowl from the skillet and continue to beat at high speed until cool and stiff.

*If the mixture remains at or over 140°F for 5 minutes, it need not reach 160°F.



Alice Medrich is a cookbook author, pastry chef, and teacher. Considered an expert on chocolate, she is the only author to win the coveted Cookbook of the Year award and Book of the Year awards from the James Beard Foundation and the International Association of Culinary Professionals three times, most recently for *Bittersweet: Recipes and Tales from a Life in Chocolate* (2004).

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