

HEALTHY CAKES

from www.healthy-eating-made-easy.com

Every family loves home-made cakes, and these are some of the most popular recipes on my site. Enjoy making these delicious cakes, but first read the hints for adapting your own collection of cake recipes to make them healthier.

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Healthy Cakes – How to Adapt Recipes and Enjoy Cakes in a Healthy Diet

Eating cakes as part of a healthy diet isn't a problem, but it's virtually impossible unless you make your own cakes. That way, you know exactly what's in them and can enjoy them, knowing there are no unhealthy fats or additives lurking.

- Home-made cakes generally contain far less sugar than commercial cakes. Inspect the labels of bought cakes, and you'll find all sorts of food additives that you'd probably rather not eat, especially the spectacularly unhealthy trans fats and hydrogenated vegetable oils, present in many manufactured cakes, which have a proven link to coronary heart disease.
- Home-made cakes are good value for money.
- Be selective about the recipes you use. Save the chocolate fudge cakes, or cakes with thick frostings for special occasions. Look for recipes that use fruit, nuts or carrots. It's a good way of getting extra fruit and veg into your diet.
- Use wholesome ingredients. Choose organic when you can for sugar, flour, oats, fruits including candied and dried fruits, milk, eggs, butter.
- Use wholewheat flour instead of some, or all, of the flour in your recipe.
- Beware soft margarines sold specifically for cake making. These are often made with hydrogenated vegetable oils, and will render your lovely home-made cake as unhealthy as a greasy take-away muffin. Softened organic butter works fine in most recipes, or use a soft spread made from healthy olive or sunflower oils.
- Replace some of the sugar in recipes with fruit puree. Use apples, prunes or apricots. Stew in a little water until tender, blend, and use to replace an equal volume of sugar in your recipe.
- You can also replace some of the fat in the same way. Try replacing half the fat and half the sugar in a recipe with pureed apple. It's very successful, and adds moistness and a subtle fruity flavour.
- Cake making is very satisfying, and if you choose simple recipes, it's also very quick. Making a large cake takes about 10-15 mins, plus baking time. Not long, for something that's so much pleasanter to eat, and so much better for you than manufactured cake.

Good Food Matters

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Healthy Banana Cake

Beautifully moist and full of fruity flavour, this healthy banana cake recipe is also very quick to make.

You can't get much more banana-y than this fruit-crammed recipe, one to remember when you find you have a whole bunch of bananas in the bowl which have mysteriously ripened overnight and are crying out 'Eat me!' Grated citrus rinds add a bit of zest, but don't worry if you don't have an orange or lemon to hand, they aren't crucial.

It's a great cake for lunch boxes, and keeps well for 2-3 days in an airtight container. You can make it in a loaf tin for slicing, or put the mixture into muffin cases for individual cakes.

Method

- Grease and base-line a loaf tin measuring 8.5 by 19cm (1 lb capacity), or set 12 paper muffin cases into a muffin tin. Heat the oven to 180C/gas 4. Put 75g (1/3 cup) softened butter, 110g (1/2 cup) caster sugar and 1 large beaten egg into a bowl.
- Sift in 225g (2 cups) plain (all-purpose) flour and 2 level tsp baking powder. Use an electric mixer to whisk these ingredients together until thoroughly combined. Add the grated rind of 1 lemon and 1 orange.
- Slice 4 ripe bananas into another bowl, and mash with a fork until pulpy. Add to the flour mixture, along with 50g (cups) chopped walnuts and whisk again thoroughly.
- Spoon the mixture into the tin or cases and bake until risen and browned, and springs back when pressed with a finger. A loaf takes about 50 minutes, muffins around 15-20 mins. Leave the loaf to cool in the tin for 10 minutes before turning on to a wire tray.

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Moist Spicy Carrot Cake

This recipe can't claim to be low fat, because it does use both butter and oil, but it can be served in small portions because it's very filling. Cut it into fingers once cooled, rather than letting the family loose on it with a knife - it'll last longer that way! It's another great cake for lunch boxes, and keeps well for 2-3 days in an airtight container.

Method

- Grease and base-line a 20cm square, loose-based cake tin. Heat the oven to 180C/gas 4.
- Peel and grate (shred) 100g (1 cup) carrots. Sift 250g (2 1/4 cups) self-raising flour and 2 tsp ground cinnamon into a bowl. Stir in the carrots, plus 300g (1 1/3 cups) demarara sugar, 100g (1 cup) desiccated coconut, 100g (3/4 cup) sultanas, 75g (1/4 cup) chopped walnuts.
- In another bowl, beat together 2 eggs, 1/2 tsp vanilla extract, 100g (1/2 cup) melted butter, 100ml (1/4 cup) vegetable oil. Stir this mixture thoroughly into the flour mix.
- Put mixture into cake tin and bake for 45-50 minutes until golden and firm to touch. Leave to cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then turn on to a wire rack to cool. Cut into 16 fingers.

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Sugar-free Pineapple Muffins

Muffins are always a favourite, and these are particularly good because they are sugar free. Instead, they're sweetened with pineapple juice, and also contain crushed pineapple. If you use canned pineapple, buy the type that's canned in juice, rather than in syrup. That way, you can drain off the juice to use in the recipe.

55g (1/2 cup or 1 stick) butter, softened
3 eggs
225ml (1 cup) pineapple juice
1 teaspoon lemon juice
280g (2 ½ cups) plain (all-purpose) flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
225ml (1 cup) well-drained crushed pineapple

- Preheat oven to 180C/ 350F/gas 4.
- Combine the butter and eggs in a mixing bowl and beat until the mixture is light and smooth. Add the pineapple juice and lemon juice and mix well. In another smaller bowl, mix together the flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt. Add the flour mixture to the butter and eggs. Mix well. Stir in the crushed pineapple. Do not overmix the batter as it will result in a tough muffin.
- Grease a 12-hole muffin tin or line with paper muffin cups. Fill the cups two-thirds full with the muffin mix. Bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the muffins comes out clean.

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Blueberry Muffins

Blueberries are a fantastic fruit. They're packed with vitamins and antioxidants, in fact one serving of blueberries contains as many valuable antioxidants as five servings of apples, carrots or broccoli. They're an excellent fruit to include in the famous five portions of fruit and veg a day.

The trouble is, that shop-bought blueberry muffins tend to be nasty, greasy things, full of hydrogenated vegetable oils and other nasties.

This healthy blueberry muffin recipe is a real find – so easy, that a 10-year old can make them in minutes. The muffins contain banana as well as blueberries, for another helping of fruit. What's more, cooked blueberries have a much richer, sweeter flavour than the raw fruit.

Method

- Makes 14. Preheat oven to 375F/190C/gas 5.
- Sift together 275g (2 ½ cups) flour, 2 tsp baking powder, ½ tsp salt, ½ tsp ground cinnamon.
- Cut 2 ripe bananas into chunks, and puree in a blender. Add 2 eggs, 130g (¾ cup) soft brown sugar, 90g (⅓ cup) softened butter and 1 tsp vanilla extract and blend again. Pour this mixture into the flour mix, and stir well to combine.
- Gently fold through 1 punnet washed blueberries. Spoon the mixture into greased muffin tins and bake for 25 minutes until risen and golden brown.
- Cool in the tin for 10 mins, then put on a wire rack to finish cooling. The muffins keep well for 2-3 days in an airtight container.

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Sticky Chocolate Cake

Rich and gooey, this healthy chocolate recipe is a real winner.

I first made this cake for a friend who can't eat dairy products. Running my eye down the list of ingredients, I didn't have very high hopes - with no butter and no eggs, was this really going to be a cake worth eating?

The answer was a resounding 'Yes'. The cake is wonderfully dark, rich and delicious, as well as being very quick and easy to make. To make the recipe even healthier, you can substitute apple puree for the oil.

Method

- Grease and base-line a 20cm round, loose-based cake tin. Heat the oven to 180C/gas 4.
- Sift together (1 1/2 cups) plain flour, 4 tbsp cocoa powder, (1 cup) caster sugar, 1 tsp baking powder, 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda (baking soda) and 1/2 tsp salt.
- In a separate bowl, mix together (1/3 cup) of vegetable oil or apple puree, 1 tbsp vinegar, 1 tsp vanilla essence, 250ml (1 cup) warm water. Mix these into the dry ingredients until just amalgamated. Do not over mix.
- Pour into the prepared tin and bake for 30-35 minutes until the cake has risen and springs back when pressed.

Serve the cake just as it is, or to make it extra special, top with Greek yogurt and fresh raspberries.

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