

Bake it Better

You can have your cake and eat it, too—by making some basic changes and experimenting with your favorite baked goods. By Diana Price

Michell Janah spends a lot of time thinking about how to revise, revamp, and boost recipes to ensure that her tasty treats are as nutritious as they are delicious. Creating baked goods that truly do a body good is a passion for Michell, who is pastry chef at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Michell knows that nutrition is a key concern of the patients and the families who regularly sample her goods, but she also knows that the pleasure of eating a truly tasty and satisfying treat is equally important, so she works to create recipes that meet both needs. The process of identifying which ingredients can be modified, added, or taken out of a recipe can be extensive, she says. “Baking is a science; it’s not like cooking, where you can just toss ingredients into a pan and magically create something delicious. Baking requires that the ingredients all work together to rise or set in a particular way.” Figuring out the chemistry of how everything will come together to create an end product that meets her high standards takes patience. “A typical recipe that I might try to switch over can go through anywhere from one to 12 evolutions before my standards of appearance and taste are met.”

Michell’s main goals in modifying her recipes at CTCA are to cut fat and sugar content and boost nutritional value—all while developing delicious and satisfying taste and texture. Cutting sugar in a given item is fairly simple, she says. “The



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amount of sugar can usually just be reduced. A lot of baking recipes are too sweet to start, so when I typically work with a recipe I start by reducing the sugar by one-third and then tweak it as I go.” Alternately, Michell might substitute sugar with a sweet fruit or vegetable such as bananas, shredded apples, dates, raisins, or carrots. Lowering the fat content in a recipe can be a bit more tricky, Michell says, but a good way to start is by “cutting the fat content—be it butter or oil—in half and substituting an all-natural applesauce or an all-natural fruit juice for the other half.”

Equally as important as reducing fat and sugar is boosting the nutritional value of the foods she makes, as nutritional support is key for cancer patients’ overall wellness. Luckily, Michell says, options abound for increasing nutrients. Some of her favorite methods include:

- Adding puréed black beans to a favorite brownie recipe to boost the protein level and up fiber content
- Substituting half of the white flour with an unrefined whole-wheat variety
- Adding applesauce to cut the fat and moisten baked goods
- Adding raw shredded zucchini to apple pie for a boost of fiber
- Leaving the peels on veggies and fruits to help boost fiber content
- Substituting egg whites for half of the eggs in a given recipe to lessen the fat
- Adding a tablespoon of ground flaxseed meal to every recipe to up the fiber content (it adds a nutty flavor and hides very well in everything)
- In recipes that call for white sugar, substituting a more natural product like brown rice syrup, agave nectar, raw all-natural honey, or, if sugar must be used, keeping it unrefined by using raw Turbinado or brown sugar.

Home cooks who want to try to modify their own favorite recipes should have fun with the process, Michell says. “It’s not always going to come out great, but this is where the playing comes in. When something doesn’t bake like it should or comes out tasting not so great, go back to the drawing board.” Cooks should also keep in mind that when modifying an old favorite, the final product—though reminiscent of the original—will no doubt taste different: “I guarantee that you can make your favorite cake recipe be healthy and taste good. It just takes a little testing and playing with ingredients to get it there. But you also have to remember that you are creating an entirely new recipe—this is not your grandmother’s cake recipe anymore.” **CFThrive**



Black Bean Brownies

Yield: 36 small brownies

Michell says that her original brownie recipe had more than twice the sugar of this revised version. In addition to reducing the sugar, she boosted protein and fiber by adding the black bean purée and flaxseed meal. The thick, fudgy frosting adds a decadent finish—and a healthier one, thanks to the low-fat cream cheese and maple sugar, which, according to Michell, has a much lower sugar count than traditional refined white sugar. The result: a treat that is both decadent and nutritious, making it a top pick at CTCA.

½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder

½ cup butter

1 cup brown sugar or maple sugar

1 cup black bean purée (rinse and drain black beans before puréeing)

4 eggs

½ cup organic unrefined white flour

¼ cup ground flaxseed

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon baking powder

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Mix cocoa powder, butter, sugar, and black bean purée. Add eggs until combined into mixture. Sift dry ingredients together and stir into mixture. Spread into prepared pan. Bake 30 to 40 minutes or until set. Cool brownies to room temperature before frosting.

Dark Chocolate Frosting

16 ounces low-fat cream cheese

1 tablespoon butter

1 cup cocoa powder

1½ cups powdered maple sugar

1 tablespoon soy milk or skim milk

Cream together cream cheese and butter. Add cocoa powder and maple sugar, scraping bowl down several times. Whip in milk. Frosting should be light and fluffy.

Carrot Cake

Yield: 1 double-layer, 9-inch round cake

Though many people think of carrot cake as an already healthy cake because of the carrots, Michell says that this is far from the truth. "Carrot cake is one of the highest-fat and highest-sugar cakes on the books." The good news, she says, is that it's one of the easiest cakes to modify. "I used half white and half wheat flour, and I was able to cut the sugar way down by adding in fruits (pineapple, raisins, coconut, and applesauce) to help sweeten it. In addition, I cut the butter out entirely and added applesauce and a lower-fat oil. Finally, I added a lot more spices, many of which have been shown to have disease prevention qualities, and which also help with taste changes that can occur when a patient is going through chemotherapy and radiation treatments."

1½ cups organic unrefined white flour

1½ cups organic unrefined wheat flour

1 tablespoon baking soda

1 tablespoon cinnamon

¾ teaspoon salt

4 eggs

1 cup canola/olive oil combination

1¼ cups skim milk

1¼ tablespoons distilled white vinegar

2 cups Sugar in the Raw

1 cup applesauce

3 teaspoons vanilla

1½ cups pineapple, crushed and drained

1 cup raisins

3 cups grated carrots

8 ounces shredded coconut

1½ cups chopped pecans

½ tablespoon nutmeg

½ tablespoon ginger

½ tablespoon cloves

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease and flour two 9-inch round cake pans. Whisk all ingredients together. Bake 25 to 30 minutes until toothpick comes out clean.



Cream Cheese Frosting

1 cup butter

1 8-ounce package reduced-fat cream cheese

4-6 cups powdered maple sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon vanilla

Whip butter and cream cheese in a mixer on high speed until fully incorporated into each other. Add the salt, vanilla, and one cup of the maple sugar. Whip on high until light and fluffy. Continue to add sugar one cup at a time whipping at high speed, until you reach the desired consistency.

* Thicker frostings are needed for icing a cake; light and fluffy is needed for cupcakes.