

## Iso-baking 101: keep calm, keep cooking, and carry on

In the complicated days of COVID-19, home-cooking is making a comeback.

Whether you're #IsoBaking or #CoronaCooking, the kitchen is a great place to ease your stress and anxiety, entertain the kids, connect with your culture, and cook the recipes of family and friends that feel far away.

And, along with the delicious smells of freshly baked treats, comes a sense of comfort and control, a feeling of purpose and productivity.

However, too many sweet treats and snacks can quickly add up, turning a healthy distraction into an unhealthy pastime. So, we've rounded up some helpful hints, tips and recipes for healthier baking, so that when it comes to your health, you can have your cake and eat it too.

### Savvy swaps

You can be savvy about the choices you make to satisfy your sweet tooth, says Jean Hailes naturopath Sandra Villella. "You can bake cakes and biscuits with minimal nutritional benefits, or you could try substituting more wholesome ingredients to make something that will still satisfy a craving for sweetness, but also provide some nutrition," she says.

"I usually look for a recipe based on what I have at home and adapt it by swapping the plain flour for a wholegrain flour or oats."

Wholegrain flour contains more fibre than plain flour, so can help keep your digestive system happy. Oats are another wholegrain food that contain the fibre known as beta-glucan, which can help to improve cholesterol levels and boost heart health.

*Tip: You can make oat flour by simply whizzing whole oats in the food processor for a few pulses until it's a scruffy flour, or pulse for longer if you're wanting a finer powder.*

Another of Sandra's go-to flours for healthier baking is wholemeal spelt flour, which she says can be replaced in most recipes that ask for plain flour.

This and other less-processed ingredients may be particularly hard to come by in the supermarkets right now, but you could try your local health-food store, or even order the ingredients online, where they may be less expensive.

## Subbing out sugars

White sugar is a common ingredient Sandra swaps out of baking recipes for lower-GI options such as coconut sugar or maple syrup.

“Coconut sugar substitutes well for white sugar if you’re baking biscuits” she says. “I also like to use honey or maple syrup in cakes and slices.”

Sandra explains that the GI of carbohydrate foods indicates their effect on your blood sugar levels. “Lower GI foods are better for you – they digest at a slower rate and keep blood sugar levels rising gradually,” she says.

## More natural sugar = less added sugar

Many fruits and even some vegies can be wonderful additions to baking, providing not only natural sweetness, but added nutrition in the form of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals.

Using naturally sweet foods also means the recipe will rely less on added sugars.

Some of Sandra’s favourite sweet ingredients are bananas, apples, dried figs, dates and even sweet potato and pumpkin, so look for recipes that include these ingredients, such as her Pumpkin almond spice cake recipe (below).

*Tip: If your bananas are a bit under-ripe, to sweeten them up for baking simply put the unpeeled bananas on a baking sheet in a 120°C oven. Bake until soft (around 15-20 minutes), let cool, peel, and you’re good to go.*

## Friendly fats for baking

Even though butter is many a baker’s best friend, for some recipes Sandra prefers to use macadamia nut oil.

“Macadamia nut oil is a healthy monounsaturated fat – the same type of fat as olive oil,” she says. “Monounsaturates are thought to be one of the reasons why the Mediterranean diet is so healthy.”

Another reason why Sandra often uses macadamia nut oil in baking is that it is a ‘stable’ oil. “This means that heat does not disrupt its chemical structure, and it is more resistant to oxidation – the process that produces damaging free radicals,” she says.

As a general guide for baking, Sandra says you’ll need about one-third less macadamia nut oil than butter. For example, if a recipe asks for 150g of butter, then use just 100g of macadamia nut oil. And this substitution works best in cakes and slices rather than biscuits.

*Tip: You can tell which types oils and fats are more 'stable' to cook with simply by putting them in the fridge. If they go hard, then they are stable. If they stay liquid, then they're less stable and more prone to damage when heated. Examples of stable cooking fats and oils are butter, olive oil and macadamia oil.*

### Healthy baking ideas

The recipe section on the Jean Hailes website is brimming with healthier baking recipes, but here are some of Sandra's favourites.

#### ***Cranberry oat granola cookies***

These wheat-free satisfying cookies have a prep time of just 20 minutes. And little helping hands in the kitchen can help to roll them into balls and flatten them into shape. [See recipe.](#)

#### ***Pumpkin almond spice cake***

Pumpkin provides a natural sweetness. Together with almond meal, cinnamon, ginger and nutmeg, this recipe makes for a moist and delicately spiced cake. [See recipe.](#)

#### ***Anzac biscuits***

Anzac Day may be over for 2020, but these biscuits – with the low-GI goodness of rolled oats – are a delicious snack that can be enjoyed with a cup of tea any day of the year. [See recipe.](#)

#### ***Muesli slice***

The secret ingredient of this moreish muesli slice? Macadamia nut oil, rich in the healthy monounsaturated fats. [See recipe.](#)

#### ***Raw cacao & ginger balls***

An easy and sweet after-dinner treat that will help to calm the digestive system. [See recipe.](#)

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