

What Do The Ingredients In A Recipe Actually Do?

BY SHARON GUTHMILLER
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What purpose do ingredients commonly found in recipes actually perform? Is it possible just to use less of one ingredient in a recipe or is it possible just to substitute one ingredient for another in altering a recipe successfully?

Some recipes (not all) can be altered by simply reducing an ingredient or substituting one for another. We often hear that one way to improve one's diet is to alter the recipes we like by using less fat, sugar, and salt. The type of food, as well as your personal tastes and standards may determine whether you may or may not be satisfied with the results of these changes.

Reducing sugar, salt, and fat can affect different foods in different ways. It is helpful to know the functions of these ingredients in different foods, the typical proportions of the ingredients, and understand the effects of reducing these ingredients in different foods.

Cooked Fruits: Sugar helps retain shape and texture in cooked fruit. When too much sugar is used, fruits shrink and become firm. Too much sugar hides true fruit flavor. Sugar increases transparency, which brightens the color of fruit. Typical proportion is 1/2 cup sugar to each cup of water used in cooking. Possible effects with reduced sugar include a softer texture of fruit, color not as bright and the flavor would be less sweet.

Canned vegetables: Salt adds flavor to the vegetables. Typical proportion of salt is 1 teaspoon per quart; 1/2 teaspoon salt per pint. Reduced salt may affect the flavor of the vegetable.

Custards and Puddings: Sugar makes a softer custard and raises the temperature of coagulation (being thickened). Salt adds flavor. Typical proportions include: 1 1/2 to 3 tablespoons sugar per cup of milk; 1/8 teaspoon salt per cup of milk. Consistency of custard or pudding will be stiffer and baking time may be shorter with less sugar with reduced sugar. Salt adds flavor to custard or pudding. Reduced salt may affect the flavor.

Pasta, Rice and Legumes: Salt adds flavor. Typical proportion is 1 teaspoon salt to each cup of uncooked pasta, rice, and legumes. Flavor change may happen as a result of reduced salt.

Pickles: Sugar is important for texture of pickles and may act as a preservative if used in high enough proportions. Salt is essential in brine to permit the growth of certain microorganisms that produce acid. Acid prevents spoilage. Proportions can be highly variable. It is best to use a recipe that has been tested for proper proportions of salt, sugar and acid levels. Do not



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attempt to alter pickle recipes. There may be spoilage and changes in texture if acid levels are reduced.

Quick breads: Fat shortens and tenderizes by coating the gluten in dough. Pastries that are said to be "short" are crisp and crumbly because they are made with a large proportion of butter or other shortening. Sugar sweetens, tenderizes, and causes outer surfaces to brown during baking. Sugar also delays drying out and may increase the volume. Salt adds flavor. Typical proportions include: 1 to 4 tablespoons fat per cup flour; 1 to 4 tablespoons sugar per cup flour; 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon salt per cup flour.

Possible effects of reduced sugar, fat, and salt include: Less sugar may result in less browning. The texture may be less tender and there will be greater tendency to tunnel, and a greater tendency for bread to dry out. Less fat may result in a less tender and dry texture and a greater tendency to tunnel. Reduced salt may affect flavor slightly. The amount of time the bread will keep will be shortened.

Cookies: Sugar increases browning, tenderness, and spreading while baking. It also gives a sweet flavor. Fat increases tenderness. Salt adds flavor. Typical recipe proportions include: 1/3 to 1 1/3 cups sugar per cup flour; 1/4 to 1/2 cup fat per cup flour; 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon salt per cup flour. Less sugar means less spread, paler crust, less tender texture, and less sweet flavor. Reduced fat may make cookies less tender. Reduced salt may affect the flavor slightly.

Candies: Sugar is needed for crystallization, proper consistency, texture, and flavor. Fat contributes to rich flavor and helps prevent large crystals from forming. Typical recipe proportions include: About 3 cups of sugar per cup liquid; fat can be highly variable; salt amounts also can vary. Possible effects of reduced sugar, fat, and salt include: Volume, texture, and consistency may be affected drastically if sugar is reduced. Do not change sugar amounts in candy recipes. Fat reduction may make a coarser texture. Salt reduction may affect flavor. Texture of the candy will not be as firm, color not as bright, flavor not as sweet due to alteration of ingredients in recipe.

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What Can Parents Do To Get Kids To Eat?

BY ANNE BROCKHOFF
McClatchy Newspapers (©2010 MCT)

Young children are notoriously finicky. Broccoli, salmon, beets — name a healthy food, and there's a preschooler who won't eat it. But many just as quickly rule out carrots, pot roast or scrambled eggs, or anything that's not white or smothered in ketchup.

"Picky, picky, picky," many a parent, myself included, has muttered over the antics of a recalcitrant pint-sized diner.

Of course, worrying about what children eat is nothing new. But parental concern has reached a fever pitch in this age of hyperparenting, rising rates of childhood obesity and a tide of "kid-friendly" food products.

"The trend in recent years is that almost everybody has become more anxious about it," says Ellyn Satter, a registered dietitian and family therapist and author of "Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family" (Kelcy Press, 2008).

I certainly have. With my first child, I thought I had it all figured out. She was a happy eater, devouring almost everything I cooked. We took her to Thai, Mexican, Italian and sushi restaurants, burger joints and barbecue shacks. She loved it all. Now 6, she's still up for at least one bite of anything.

Not so with Daughter No. 2, who lived on bread, fruit and milk for an entire year. A third child has now joined us at the table. He has eaten everything from peas to pineapple and lasagna to lamb, but will his enthusiasm persist? What can I do if it doesn't?

The uncomfortable answer: Nothing. Parents can cajole, demand and camouflage, but it's hard to make a child eat something he doesn't want to. Forcing the issue merely turns the dinner table into a battlefield. That's not me talking. I'm broadly summarizing Satter's approach to feeding children, something she calls the division of responsibility.

"The parent controls the what, when and where of feeding," Satter says. "The child is responsible for how much and whether to eat."

Her advice sounds simple, yet it's hard to follow. Nothing is as disheartening as seeing tiny lips clamp shut against a lovingly prepared meal. It's easy to give in and race back to the kitchen in search of something — anything — your child will eat. Or buy packaged toddler or kiddie foods with his favorite character on the box. Or stick to the universal children's menu of burgers, grilled cheese and pizza.

These tactics achieve the ultimate goal: a full tummy. But none teaches your child about enjoying a variety of foods, says Nancy Tringali Pihlo, author of "My Two-Year-Old Eats Octopus" (Bull Publishing, 2009).

"You want to expose kids to a lot of foods, a lot of flavors and a lot of textures early on as their tastes are beginning to develop," Pihlo says.

The best way to do that, she says, is to serve children the same meal you make for yourself. They don't need separate "kid-friendly" foods or snacks, many of which are inferior to the grown-up versions in both taste and nutrition. Parents are often surprised by the spices, cuisines or dishes — in the case of my oldest, barbecued eel — their kids take to.

It's no surprise to chef Cecilia Green, who prepares two snacks and lunch daily for about 75 children at Christots Country Montessori Day School in Shawnee, Kan. On the day I visited, lunch included turkey-spinach casserole, tomato-and-cucumber salad, bananas and whole-wheat bread. The meal was served family-style, and the students (ages 2 1/2 to 6 years) dug in, several happily helping them-



SHANE KEYSER/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT
Riley Rigdon tries some shepherd's pie during lunch time at Christots Country Montessori Day School in Shawnee, Kansas, where children learn how nutritious food helps their bodies grow and stay healthy, sometimes by playing a food version of the red light/green light game.

Children learn how nutritious food helps their bodies grow and stay healthy, sometimes by playing a food version of the red light/green light game. They help harvest vegetables from an organic garden, as well as plums, peaches and pears from the orchard.

Kids who say "yuck" at the table are encouraged to talk instead about foods they do like and why those foods like them. Peer pressure prompts new students to taste unfamiliar foods. After all, if everyone else is eating it, that spinach might just be pretty good.

Unfortunately, the same dynamic doesn't always work at home. In families like mine, kids outnumber adults at the table. They're often suspicious of new foods, are prone to food fetishes and go on food strikes. Favorites today might be despised tomorrow.

In "Hungry Monkey" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), Matthew Amster-Burton relates his daughter's slide from chowing spicy enchiladas and pork curry into what he describes as extreme pickiness. He was bummed but kept cooking Brussels sprouts, roasted trout with fennel and Chinese-style spareribs.

He took his daughter food shopping and let her grind meat for meatballs. And then he backed off once it was all on the plate. "When I put the food down in front of Iris, my job is done," Amster-Burton writes. "I also don't hold myself responsible for making sure it goes in her mouth."

I recently adopted that approach in hopes of helping my kids develop a more positive, healthy relationship with food. My own 2-year-old is far from eating octopus, but dinner-time is definitely more enjoyable for us all now.

Here's what else I've learned:

Remember the when and where: Food is a big part of a small child's day, Satter reminds us. She recommends offering three meals and two snacks about the same time each day, preferably while seated, so kids can focus on their food and learn a few manners.

Satter's approach is detailed on her Web site, www.elynsatter.com. Skip the kiddie foods. Children's food products often rely on sweeteners, salt and fat for much of their appeal, making it hard for kids to develop a taste for anything else, Pihlo says.

Don't label: Calling a child picky gives her license to refuse food and discourages parents from trying new things. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy that can also damage a child's self-esteem, Satter says.

Don't give up: Toddlers especially are wary of new foods and might need to see, smell and touch a food many, many times before agreeing to taste — much less eat — it. Develop a repertoire of standards, but keep presenting a variety of things. Your child might not eat broccoli today, or tomorrow, or even next year. But if you don't offer it, he never will.

You really have to take a long-term approach," Pihlo says. "We've got a long time with these kids."

BROWNED AND BRAISED BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Makes 2 servings

- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups frozen Brussels sprouts, thawed and halved lengthwise
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup water

In a large skillet, heat the butter and oil over medium-high until the butter foams. Add the Brussels sprouts and cook until lightly browned, turning once or twice and sprinkling with salt and pepper, about 5 minutes. Add the water, cover and reduce heat to medium-low. Cook 10 minutes or until sprouts are tender but not mushy. Uncover, boil off any remaining water and serve.

SICILIAN SWEET AND SOUR TUNA PASTA

Makes 6 servings

- 1 (1-pound) box penne or fusilli pasta
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 (5-ounce) cans tuna, well-drained
- 1/3 cup capers, well-drained (if not available, substitute 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar)
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley, or chopped basil

Cook pasta until firm (al dente). Reserve 1/2 cup pasta cooking water, and then drain pasta and return to pot. While pasta is cooking, warm olive oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, until golden, about 7 minutes. Stir in tuna, capers, tomatoes, raisins and reserved cooking water. Stir well to warm and combine. Stir pasta into tuna mixture. Top with parsley, stir well and serve immediately.

TURKEY-SPINACH CASSEROLE

Makes 8 servings

- 1 pound ground turkey
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 (10.75-ounce) can condensed cream of celery or cream of mushroom soup
- 1 pound frozen spinach
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 pound shredded mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Brown ground turkey and onion, and then drain. Stir in soup and bring to a simmer. Blanch spinach until tender, and then drain. Add salt, pepper, garlic and eggs to spinach and mix well. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.

Spread meat mixture on the bottom of the dish. Top with spinach mixture. Sprinkle with cheese and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until cheese is melted.

A Treat That's Rich Yet Frosting-Free

BY JULIE ROTHMAN

The Baltimore Sun (©2010 MCT)

Hope Dailey of Sykesville, Md., wrote in on behalf of a friend about a recipe for coconut pound cake. She said her friend's mother-in-law made this cake with lots of eggs, butter and frozen coconut and she thinks it may have been a Southern recipe. Dotty Rather of Knoxville, Tenn., sent in a recipe for coconut cream cheese pound cake, which she said came from an older issue of Southern Living. The cake is rich, dense and delicious. It is rife with coconut flavor and needs no frosting or glaze.

COCONUT POUND CAKE

- Makes: 10 servings
- 1/2 cup butter, softened
 - 1/2 cup shortening
 - 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
 - 3 cups sugar

- 6 eggs
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 (6-ounce) package frozen coconut, thawed
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon coconut flavoring

Cream butter, shortening and cream cheese together in a bowl. Gradually add sugar, beating well at medium speed. Add eggs, one at a time, beating after each addition, then add vanilla extract and coconut flavoring.

In another bowl, sift flour, soda and salt together. Add dry ingredients to creamed mixture, stirring until blended. Stir in coconut. Pour batter into a greased, floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake in a preheated 325 degree oven for 1 1/2 hours or until toothpick tests clean. Cool in pan for 10 to 15 minutes. Turn out of pan and cool on a wire rack.

REQUESTS

—Judy Schwalben of Santa Rosa, Calif., is looking for the

recipe for a dessert she made "cons ago" that she thinks was called Danish apple dessert. It was made with applesauce, condensed milk, lemon rind, separated eggs and bread crumbs.

—Nancy Hawkins from Oliver Springs, Tenn., is looking for a

recipe for a chocolate cake called "Aussie dump cake." She said the cake was actually just dumped out of the pan and was a mixture of gooey melted chocolate and cake. If you are looking for a recipe or can answer a request, e-mail recipefinder@baltusun.com.

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