

# 6 Healthy Alternatives to Toxic Foods

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## The alternative to high fructose corn syrup

### Maple Syrup

Maple syrup is very flavorful and tastes wonderful in oatmeal or on pancakes. It contains some minerals – calcium, zinc, potassium, iron, and trace minerals. Maple syrup comes from boiling the sap of maple trees. If it's not labeled "Pure", maple syrup is probably mixed with cane or corn sugar and preservatives. Be sure to choose organic maple syrup since the processes for harvesting the sap may include unsafe chemicals if not organic. It's best to refrigerate it after opening. In baked treats: 1 cup white sugar = 3/4 cup maple syrup, plus reduce recipe liquid by a few tablespoons. It can also be purchased as granulated maple crystals for recipes and baking.

### Coconut Sugar or Nectar

Coconut sugar is extracted from the sap of the coconut palm. It has a lower glycemic index than regular sugar and also has a small amount of nutrients so there is slower absorption into the bloodstream. Make sure the label says it's 100% coconut palm or sap. The nectar is a thick syrup. It doesn't taste like coconut and can be used in place of brown sugar for baking, raw deserts, sauces, and drinks.

### Raw Honey

Raw honey contains nutrients, including antioxidants. In its raw form, honey has many health benefits when used in moderation, including probiotic, antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal qualities. Moderation is key since honey is high in fructose and will have the same negative effects of other high fructose sugars in larger amounts. Most honey that you find in the store is highly processed and should be avoided. Find local, raw honey that is unprocessed. Shipping it requires heating, which removes the health benefits, so buy local.

### Stevia

Stevia is an herb that is extremely sweet, and it's safe in its natural form. It has no calories and a very low glycemic index so does not create a spike in blood sugar. With herbs, the synergistic effect of all ingredients in the entire plant is what provides the health effects and protection against potential harm. Therefore, use the green powder, which is simply ground up stevia leaves. The clear liquid and white powder extracted stevia products may be extracted with chemicals.

Because of its texture, you can't use stevia in baking, but you can add it to cereal, yogurt, drinks, and smoothies. Stevia can have a bitter aftertaste and it's important to use it sparingly.

## **Date Sugar**

Date sugar is simply dried dates ground into a powder. Date sugar is very sweet and not a low-glycemic sugar, so it's best to use two-thirds the amount of date sugar in place of brown or white sugar called for in your recipe. It can be used on oatmeal and in yogurt but doesn't dissolve in hot tea or coffee. It can clump so needs to be well blended. You can usually substitute it in recipes that call for brown sugar.

## **Blackstrap Molasses**

Molasses is a thick syrup produced in sugar cane processing. It has a lower glycemic index than regular sugar, meaning it metabolizes more slowly so doesn't lead to blood sugar spikes like sugar. Blackstrap is the most nutritious type of molasses – high in iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium and selenium, copper, and vitamin B6.

It has a strong, bittersweet taste, but it's worth trying to see if your kids will like it since it's a good alternative sweetener. It can be used in baking. Gingerbread and gingersnap cookies are made with molasses, and it's also added baked beans to provide sweetness. You can add a little molasses to oatmeal and use it on pancakes instead of syrup. It's best to buy it organic and unsulfured.

## **Turbinado, Sucanat, and Rapadura**

These are all made from sugar cane juice and less refined and processed than white sugar. They can be used in recipes to replace sugar 1:1. Rapadura is the least refined and processed and adds a molasses flavor and a dark color. Turbinado and sucanat can be substituted for white sugar in equal amounts in baking and have a sort of molasses-like flavor. But they are nowhere near molasses in terms of nutrition. The small amount of nutrients you may get with this type of sugar is insignificant.



# The alternative to processed meats

**Tempeh** - Tempeh is a nutty-flavored soybean product made from cooked and fermented soybeans. One cup has about 19 grams of protein—in addition to fiber, calcium and vitamins. With a consistency that's much firmer than tofu, it can be used in a greater variety of dishes, including as a ground beef substitute in dishes like shepherd's pie and sloppy joes, as a diced chicken substitute in chicken salad and stir-fries, and as a substitute in classic sandwiches, like pulled pork and Reubens. Bonus: You don't have to do anything extra to prep it for recipes—just chop, dice or shred as needed!

**Portobello Mushroom Caps** - Clocking in at around 5 grams of protein a serving, these "meaty" mushroom caps are a delicious alternative for burgers, sandwiches/wraps and fajitas. Plus, they have a wealth of vitamins and minerals to offer, including thiamin, potassium, vitamin B6 and folate. "We have a portobello sandwich in my restaurant and people love it," Gentry says. "It has a great texture, it's very meaty, and when marinated, it has a nice strong flavor. Tamari, miso and brown rice vinegar adhere well to it." To really re-create the feel of a burger, buy the large caps, brush with a little olive oil, then grill until tender.

**Tofu** - A good substitute for cubed pork, chicken and beef, this soybean-based protein powerhouse (3 ounces of extra-firm tofu has around 8 grams of protein) is amazingly tasty and versatile. You can enjoy it in some of your favorite—but typically meat-heavy—dishes, such as stir-fry, chef's salad and fajitas; you just need to prepare the tofu first. "Just as you'd do with chicken and red meat, you have to do something with [tofu] to give it flavor," says Ann Gentry, owner of vegan restaurant Real Food Daily in Los Angeles and author of *Vegan Family Meals*. When using tofu as a meat stand-in, buy the extra-firm style in your supermarket's refrigerated aisle. To prep the tofu, pat dry with paper towels and/or press it by wrapping in a clean kitchen towel and placing a heavy book on top of it for about an hour. This helps remove the excess moisture so it can better absorb whatever you're flavoring it with. "Marinate it in things like tamari or mirin (sweet rice wine), and then it can be cut and broiled, sautéed, grilled or fried...or coat it with flour and nuts, like almonds or pecans, similar to a cutlet,"

**Seitan** - Seitan (pronounced SAY-tan) is processed wheat gluten and a terrific alternative to meat, adding about 18 grams of protein per cup as well as a dense, chewy texture to your dish. Found in Asian groceries and most health food stores, it can be molded and flavored into just about anything, including shrimp, scallops, duck and ribs. Gentry adds that you can "make meatballs with it; grate it, slice it, chunk it; put it into anything from lasagnas and casseroles to pastas and sandwiches." It can be grilled, braised, broiled, sautéed, stir-fried and deep-fried, so any recipe that calls for hearty protein-rich ingredients, like stew, tandoori, barbecue and kebabs, is fair game.

**Beans** - Part of the legume family, beans are low in fat but high in fiber as well as vitamins and minerals, including iron, potassium and folate. On average, 1 cup will provide 5 to 7 grams of protein. When using beans as a protein substitute for ground meat in chili, quesadillas and tacos, opt for sturdier beans such as black, pinto and red kidney. If using dried beans, be sure to rinse and soak them for several hours or overnight (which is best) before cooking. Canned is also a great option, especially for time-pressed cooks. Just drain, rinse and go!

# The alternative to margarine

## Smart Balance

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Light with Flaxseed Oil
- Organic
- Omega-3

## Earth Balance

- Organic Coconut
- Olive Oil
- Soy Free
- Omega-3
- Avocado Oil
- Organic Whipped

## Coconut Oil:

Coconut oil is a good substitute for margarine in baked goods. It is solid at room temperature but, like butter and margarine, when heated will melt. It gives the cookies a delicious flavor!



# The alternative to canned foods

**Buy Fresh.** In its natural state, produce offers maximum fiber and benefits of nutrients found in and close to the outer peel. Cooking with fresh meat lets you regulate the fat content through trimming and the method of preparation. There are noticeable taste differences between fresh and canned milk products. Coordinating your cooking with seasonal cycles lets you incorporate berries, greens, seafood and other foods in your diet at their freshest and most nutritious.

**Buy frozen.** Frozen may not be quite as good as fresh, but it's a better choice than canned. Frozen, organic fruits and veggies are not that more expensive than conventional choices and they are much healthier and contain less pesticides.

**Buy dried goods and cook them.** Searching through my pantry, I find that many of my canned food purchases are beans – kidney, white, garbanzo or black. I can buy dried beans and cook them for my meals, it takes about an hour in a saucepan or just minutes with a pressure cooker.

**Grow or pick your own.** Spring is around the corner so start thinking about planting a fruit and/or veggie garden. I promise it's not a lot of work – start small with a few easy to grow veggies this summer and keep adding year after year. It feels good to walk outside each day and pick the fruit of your labor (literally). What you don't eat can be canned (in glass) for the winter. If you don't want to grow your own, go to a farm and pick them. Last summer, we picked over 30 pounds of blueberries that lasted all winter and enough strawberries to make freezer jam for a year.

**Buy Food in a Glass.** Glass is overall a safer bet than plastic. Glass can be safely used for hot foods or liquids. (Ceramic, stoneware or stainless steel containers can be safe bets, too.) Glass is cleaner than plastic. Glass' non-porous surface does



## The alternative to GMO foods

Here is a list of genetically modified foods to avoid. It's best to either buy the organic version of these foods or grow your own.

Corn  
Soybean  
Sugar Beets  
Potatoes  
Peas  
Flax  
Papaya  
Tomatoes  
Squash  
Vegetable and Canola oil  
Rice  
Salmon

Download the **Non-GMO Shopping Guide** brochure and keep it with you whenever you shop!

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# The alternative to caffeinated beverages

## **Ginkgo Biloba (Energy)**

This is an herbal extract from the nut of the tree with the same name. It has been used for centuries in Chinese medicine and works as a vasodilator, which increases blood flow, particularly to the brain and extremities. People have reported better focus, well being and even creativity when taking this herb. Ginkgo Biloba is also used to treat asthma and circulatory diseases. It can be consumed in capsule, tincture or tea.

## **Ginseng (Energy)**

This is an extract derived from the ginseng root. It grows in many parts of the world and varies in potency. Also used since ancient times, ginseng is beneficial for increased blood flow, and like coffee, has a stimulating effect. It's been shown to reduce depression and stress. It can be consumed in capsule, tincture or tea.

## **Carob (alternative to chocolate)**

Carob is a tropical pod that is derived from a tree in the Mediterranean. Its pulp is roasted and ground into a fine powder that tastes very similar to cocoa powder. Carob is naturally low in fat, high in fiber, contains calcium, and unlike cocoa or chocolate, does not contain caffeine or theobromine (a good alternative to those who are sensitive to caffeine or migraines) no tannin or methylxanthines. Additionally, it is naturally less bitter than cocoa, so it does not need additional sweetening.

Carob comes in many forms which can be used in cooking, such as powders, liquids, and carob chips. Add carob chips to trail mix, fruit, yogurt, or use it as a substitute for chocolate chips in baking (but set your oven about 25 degrees lower or it could burn!).

## **Teecino (alternative to coffee)**

Teecino is the commercial name for a wonderful caffeine-free coffee substitute that seems to be everywhere in Los Angeles but is harder to find elsewhere. A mix of carob, barley, chicory nuts and other flavors (there are all kinds of varieties) it is truly tasty, can be brewed like coffee (in a French press, via tea bags or in an espresso machine), and mixes nicely with milk, soy milk or just plain honey if you're more of a black coffee/milk-free person.

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