

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Holiday Baking Can Be Sweet, and Lower Calorie

For many families the approach of the holidays means frustration - some family members still want the traditional cakes and cookies while others really need to avoid sugar or are just trying to keep their weight down. Often Mom is caught in the middle. Does she bake the old traditional treats, or skip them all together?

With the development of low calorie sweeteners that can take the heat of baking there are now other options. Sucralose, or Splenda®, is probably the best of the sweeteners. You use the same amount as the recipe calls for. It doesn't break down or get bitter when it is heated. It doesn't have the aftertaste that many of the other sweeteners have. But you do need some tricks to make it work.

For one, even though you use the same amount to get the same sweet flavor, it's not as much. A cup of sugar is much heavier than a cup of light, fluffy Splenda®. As soon as it gets wet it melts into a tiny puddle, barely a spoonful. So a cake batter made with Splenda® will not fill a pan nearly as full as the regular batter does. That means the cake will be much thinner. It may also collapse or fall when it bakes. A batch of cookie dough will not make nearly as many cookies either.

There are a few things you can do to help fix the problem. If you can afford the calories and sugar, use the Splenda® for Baking. It's half sugar, half Splenda®, so the batter is not quite as thin and weak. If you can't afford even that much sugar, there are a few other tricks to try. Start by using a slightly smaller pan. Instead of a 9 inch pan use an 8 inch pan. That will make the batter deeper and help support it while it bakes.

Next, strengthen the batter by adding half a cup of nonfat powdered milk and 1 teaspoon of baking powder for each cup of Splenda®. The extra protein will help keep

the batter from collapsing as it bakes. The baking powder will help it rise a little more.

Another problem with Splenda® is that it does not brown as easily as sugar does. Cookies and quick breads can be fully baked and done but still look pale and raw. To solve this you can use half brown sugar and half Splenda®, sprinkle a teaspoon or two of sugar over the batter or spray the batter lightly with cooking spray just before you put it in the oven. These will help produce more browning. Of course if a cake or cookies will be frosted then you don't need to worry about the looks.

But because Splenda® doesn't brown you can't tell by the looks when the baked goods are really done. Plus, products made with Splenda® usually bake a little bit faster than usual. Cakes often take 7 to 10 minutes less time, cookies may take 3 to 5 minutes less. So check cakes and quick breads for doneness with a toothpick before the timer rings if you're adapting one of your recipes.

Splenda® does not hold moisture the way sugar does. That means that baked goods might be drier when fresh, and will surely seem stale faster. If you plan to bake in advance use at least a few tablespoons of honey or molasses to help hold moisture. These will also help with the browning.

Splenda® won't feed yeast like sugar does for yeast breads. Be sure to use at least a few teaspoons of sugar to proof the yeast and get it started. It will be able to use flour for food after it gets its start.

For foods with a very mild flavor such as puddings, custards and sauces, adding an extra teaspoon of vanilla or other flavoring will help. And be sure to keep baked goods made with Splenda® refrigerated for storage. Splenda® does not have the preserving power of regular sugar.

But fewer calories can help preserve us for a few more years! Here's a recipe for crunchy almond cookies that is super simple to make and full of healthy ingredients. Just save some for the rest of the family!

Crunchy Almond Oatmeal Cookies

1/4 cup dark brown sugar
1 cup granular Splenda®
1 Tbsp light olive oil
1/2 tsp salt
2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats

1/4 cup egg substitute
1 Tbsp melted butter
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 cup sliced almonds

Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray 2 baking sheets lightly with cooking spray. Beat the Splenda®, sugar and egg substitute together until thick. (Don't worry if it looks grainy.) Add oil, butter, vanilla and salt until mixed, then stir in the nuts and oats. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto the sprayed pans about 1 inch apart. Flatten with a glass dipped in water (to keep it from sticking). Bake 10 minutes until the edges start to brown. Cool on a rack. Makes about 48 cookies.

Two cookies have 92 calories and 9 g of carbohydrate.

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