

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Just a few simple tricks will make your cooking and baking with whole grains a lot easier. Understanding what the difference is between whole grain and refined grain can help you understand how. Even with all the public encouragement to eat more whole grains, a lot of people are still intimidated by the idea of cooking with whole wheat flour or making something other than white rice for dinner. Callers often complain that “I tried to make my usual cake (or bread or pancakes) with whole wheat flour and it didn’t rise right. It was heavy. It was uneven. How can I bake with this stuff?” Has any of that happened to you?

White, refined grains have had the colored hull and the oily germ removed. Years ago it was so difficult and time-consuming to remove the hull and germ that only the richest people could afford white flour. So white flour and white rice became status symbols. As technology improved white flour became the common flour. No one realized that the ‘status’ flour was less nutritious than the old, brown flour.

Now that we know how healthy whole grains are, it’s still hard to adjust our cooking to use them well. We can’t really just take out the white and use whole wheat flour in every recipe. But it really only takes 3 simple steps to greatly improve the quality of whole grain products. First, be sure to measure correctly. Second, use a little bit more liquid. Third, give it a little more time. Here’s why and how.

Whole wheat flour is heavier than white flour. If you don’t stir it up first you’ll end

up with more in the batter than you need. That will make a heavy, dense, dry bread or cake, or crumbly dry cookies. You don't need to sift it, but fluffing it sure helps. The best way to measure flour is like this: Stir the flour with a fork or spoon. Then, use the spoon to scoop the flour and drop it into the measuring cup. Don't pack it down, just let it fall in. When the cup is full, level it off with a flat edge. Now you have the right amount of flour.

Whole grains still have most or all of their bran, the hard outer hull. That's where most of the fiber (Grandmother's 'roughage') is. The darker colored hulls also have a lot of antioxidants and other healthy ingredients. But the problem is that they are hard. It takes more liquid to soften them. And it takes a longer time for the liquid to soak into them than into plain white starch.

What liquid you use isn't super-important. You can use water or milk, fruit juice or vegetable broth. It depends on what other flavors are in the recipe. The bakers at King Arthur's Flour prefer the sweet/sour of orange juice to wet whole wheat flour. In a recipe for a quick bread or sweet bread just a few extra tablespoons of liquid can make a big difference.

Then, give the liquid some time to soak in. Instead of sticking the batter directly into the oven, leave it sit for 10 to 15 minutes. That lets the water soften the bran, so that the batter can rise better. You won't have drier spots or dense lumps this way. Then go ahead and bake as usual. You should have a great cake!

One last tip: If you buy more whole wheat flour than you can use right away, store it in the refrigerator. Those healthy oils in the wheat germ will get rancid if they stay warm too long.

Here's a healthy way to start your day. Make some for Sunday morning, then stick the leftovers - if there are any- in the toaster for Monday. It's a great way to use up the last couple of ripe bananas. The family won't know you're serving them oatmeal!

Oat-y Banana-cakes

3 small, very ripe bananas, mashed	2 Tbps trans-free margarine, melted
1 Tbsp lemon juice	1 Tbsp sugar or sweetener
2 eggs or substitute equivalent	1 C oatmeal plus 1 - 2 tablespoons
½ tsp baking soda	½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground cinnamon	½ tsp ground nutmeg

Pulse oatmeal in a food processor until very finely ground until you have 1 cup. Stir the bananas, margarine, lemon juice and sugar in medium bowl. Beat in the eggs. In separate bowl combine 1 cup of oat flour and all the dry ingredients. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and add the liquids. Stir just until the batter is completely wet. If it's too thick add a little milk. Let batter sit for 10 minutes, then heat griddle. Cook the pancakes using 1/4 cup of batter for each one. Makes 10 - 4 inch pancakes.

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