

Fool Any Cookie Connoisseur with These Healthy [Vegan] Baking Tricks

by Jenny Sugar of Pop Sugar

Think vegan cookies are just sugary cardboard? Oh no! Just the other day, I whipped up some chocolate chip oatmeal cookies and said to my husband, "Do they taste vegan?" His response: "I can't even tell anymore." Boom! My job is done. So whether you're giving up eggs and dairy because of ethical reasons, allergies, or to save on calories, fat, and cholesterol, keep these tricks in your apron, and you'll be crafting cookies that no one will know are vegan.

Eggs

A go-to method is to replace each egg with a combination of one tablespoon of flax meal with three tablespoons of water (like in these **vegan cut-out sugar cookies**). Just mix them in a small bowl and set aside for at least five minutes so the mixture can become gelatinous and egg-like. Ground chia seeds work well too, and both add omega-3s and fiber. Cornstarch can also offer the binding effects you're after — just mix one tablespoon with two tablespoons of water to equal one egg.



Butter

To reduce saturated fat and cholesterol, you can always go the easy route and replace butter with **Earth Balance** (Smart Balance is not vegan). Using **coconut oil** is also a great option. If the recipe calls for regular butter, use the solid form of coconut oil; if it calls for melted butter, melt the coconut oil in the microwave. Just replace equal amounts, and you'll get that crispiness you're after. **Avocado** is also a healthy option — just replace half the amount with mashed avocado and the other half with an oil of your choice. Applesauce or pureed prunes work well too. Just note that your cookies will just be softer and more cake-like.



Chocolate

An easy fix, just find a brand that's dairy free, like **Ghirardelli Semi-Sweet chocolate chips**, and you're good to go. It works well when adding chips to batter (like for chocolate chip cookies), or melt in a double boiler for drizzling or coating (when making

cookies like these vegan Samoas). For a more authentic, homemade feel, buy a chocolate bar that's dairy free, chop it into little chunks, and use that in your recipe. Note that just because a package says it's dark chocolate does not mean it's vegan. Nestle's Dark Chocolate chips contain milkfat. Boo.

Sugar

Thought sugar was vegan? You'll be surprised to know that during the final purification process, white sugar may be filtered through bone char (charcoal made from animal bone) in order to get that bright-white color. And although this type of sugar is considered kosher (meaning it contains no meat or dairy), some true vegans who avoid animal products for ethical reasons shy away from white sugar and go for **unbleached cane sugar** (Sugar In The Raw) or **dehydrated and granulated cane juice** (Sucanat or Trader Joe's).

Just replace with equal parts. Another all-natural sweetener, **xylitol**, which sounds artificial, is actually made from birch tree bark or corn so it's vegan. It's stronger than regular white sugar, so if a recipe calls for one cup, use 2/3 or 3/4 cup instead.

You can also experiment with wet sweeteners like **maple syrup, agave nectar, brown rice syrup, molasses, dates, ripe bananas, pureed grapes, or strawberries**. Since these ingredients add moisture to the batter, you'll need to increase the amount of flour or other dry ingredients. These might not be the best option if a crispy or crunchy cookie is your goal.

Milk

With the plethora of dairy-free milk options, any variety will work, whether it's **almond, soy, rice, cashew, hemp, or coconut milk**. Just replace equal amounts. You can even get crazy and use chocolate or vanilla for added sweetness.

Greek Yogurt

You'll have to play around with your recipe, but try using **soy-, almond-, or coconut-milk yogurt**. Since these aren't as thick as Greek yogurt, you might need to add more flour or use less yogurt.

Source: POPSUGAR Photography / Jenny Sugar