



## Five Food Swaps for Better Nutrition

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

Some of the best changes you can make when it comes to healthier eating are food swaps that can help you just get more nutritional bang for the food you are consuming. Here are five food swaps to try:

### 1. Liquid oils over butter/coconut oil.

Liquid oils such as olive oil, canola oil or avocado oil are heart healthy options rich in unsaturated fats. Go the Italian way and dip your bread into olive oil and balsamic vinegar instead of adding butter. When I am baking items such as muffins or even birthday cake I look for recipes that use oil since this is the best fat for your heart.

Coconut oil is all the rage lately but this is not a fat you should be trying to increase in your diet. Coconut oil (which is solid at room temperature) contains a high level of saturated fats (more than butter). One positive note is that some of the saturated fat in coconut oil is lauric acid, a medium fatty acid that may have a more neutral role on heart health and blood cholesterol levels. Lauric acid can raise both the good (HDL) and bad (LDL) cholesterol levels while other saturated fats can raise LDL levels with no effect on HDL levels. Also note that hydrogenated coconut oils would not be recommended since they contain trans fats. If you are consuming a coconut oil choose virgin coconut oil and eat this in moderation. The health benefits of olive oil and other liquid plant oils trumps coconut oil.

### 2. Plain Greek yogurt over sour cream.

If you are looking for the same creamy texture of sour cream but more protein and less fat try a plain Greek yogurt instead of sour cream. This works great on baked potatoes, tacos or for vegetable dips.

### 3. Dense veggies & dark green leafy salads over light colored lettuce

The darker the lettuce the more nutrient rich your salad greens will be. Choose kale, spinach, collard greens, arugula and other darker leaf lettuces to get more beta-carotene, vitamin C, calcium, iron and phytonutrients for your health. Also consider adding dense veggies to your salads such as tomatoes, cauliflower, grated carrots and peppers that also pack a nutritional punch.

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#### 4. Vending machine nuts over potato chips

If you are looking for a savory snack go for the nuts over potato chips since they offer extra protein for satiety along with vitamins, minerals, fibre and healthy fats. The key with nuts is managing a reasonable portion size which single serving vending machine bags help with.

#### 5. Oatmeal with a kick over instant sweetened oatmeal

If you love oatmeal in the morning but have been relying on instant packages try cooking oatmeal for the week in a pot on the stove with regular rolled oats or steel cut oats and portioning into containers to take and reheat. Enhance the nutrition further by tossing in chia seeds which add calcium, hemp hearts which add protein and ground flax seeds which add omega-3 fats. Toss in frozen or fresh berries, chopped dried fruit and sliced nuts for more nutrition. Sweeten yourself with a pinch of brown sugar or maple syrup rather than relying on the manufacturer who simply adds more than needed.



#### **BONUS Fun tip!**

#### 6. Chocolate bar over packaged energy bars

As the chocoholic nutritionist you might think that I might recommend a cocoa flavored energy bar instead of a chocolate bar. Many commercial energy bars have similar amounts of calories and fat to a chocolate bar and simply put they just don't taste as good. If you are selecting an energy bar for a sweet treat you may be better off and more satisfied but eating what it is that you are truly craving. Otherwise you may find yourself chewing around a craving (eating a bunch of "chocolate-want-to-be" foods and then eating the chocolate anyways).

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*Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit [www.healthstandnutrition.com](http://www.healthstandnutrition.com). Twitter @chocoholicRD.*

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