

ALTERNATIVE SWEETENERS

Sugar has gotten a bad rap for being highly refined and a source of empty kilojoules. But what else can you use?

High intakes of sugar in the diet are linked to conditions ranging from tooth decay to diabetes. This being the case, what else can you use? If you aren't a fan of artificial sweeteners, try the following three alternatives, which provide some phytonutrients and have a lower glycemic index (GI) compared to table sugar. Or, just use sugar in very small amounts.

honey

An ancient sweetener with newly discovered medicinal properties, honey is a top choice. Certain types—think manuka and jelly bush—contain high levels of phytonutrients and aid in the treatment of non-healing diabetic ulcers. While the GI of blended honey is moderate (50–65,

which is similar to sugar), some Australian pure native floral honeys, such as yellow box, red gum and iron bark, are low GI. The downside? Honey is usually not consumed by vegans.

pure maple syrup

Produced by boiling the sap of sugar maple trees to concentrate it into a viscous, amber-coloured syrup with a unique sweet taste, pure maple syrup is a source of minerals such as manganese, zinc, iron and calcium. It also contains vitamins and phenolic compounds, which have antioxidant benefits. Like all syrup sweeteners, it provides fewer kilojoules than sugar per 100 grams and it has a low GI of 54. Just don't confuse it with the cheaper maple-flavoured syrup.

raw agave syrup

Used by the Aztecs in Central America to treat wounds because of its antibacterial properties, agave syrup (or nectar) is produced from the sap of the Mexican cactus. It has a particularly low GI of 15 (it's predominantly fructose) and it contains saponins and fructans with anti-inflammatory and prebiotic qualities. While popular among raw food enthusiasts, it can be pricey!

other sweeteners

You can also use fresh medjool dates for their texture and antioxidant-rich sweetness. But avoid highly processed sweeteners such as brown rice syrup, because they have a higher GI (98) than sugar (65), which defeats the purpose!



SWEET TREAT NUT SQUARES

An indulgent, easy-to-make treat that's full of goodness and only lightly sweetened! The nuts lower cholesterol and temper your blood sugar readings.

PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES + SETTING TIME

COOKING TIME: 5 MINUTES **MAKES** 25 SQUARES

Ingredients:

- ½ cup macadamia nuts
- ½ cup pecans
- ½ cup sunflower seeds
- ½ cup pumpkin seeds
- ½ cup LSA (linseed, sunflower, almond)
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 2 tbsp natural peanut butter

NUTRITION INFORMATION
PER SERVE: 440 kJ (105 cal).
Protein 3 g. Total fat 8 g.
Saturated fat 1 g.
Carbohydrate 5 g.
Cholesterol 0 mg.
Calcium 16 mg. Iron 0.9 mg.
Fibre 1 g.

Method:

1. Line a 20 cm x 20 cm pan with baking paper, ensuring the sides of the paper will reach approximately 5 cm above the slice.
2. Coarsely chop all nuts and place into a bowl.
3. Mix in the seeds, LSA and cinnamon.
4. Place the maple syrup and peanut butter in a small saucepan and stir on a low to medium heat until the mixture boils and darkens slightly, for about 5 minutes. Do not overcook. Mix into the dry ingredients in the bowl. The mixture should be sticky.
5. Transfer the mixture into the pre-prepared pan and flatten as much as possible using a spatula. Fold sides of baking paper over the slice and cover with an extra sheet of baking paper. Using your hands, press down firmly on the baking paper to flatten and spread the mixture evenly.
6. Leave the baking paper in place and allow to cool to room temperature. Cover with cling film and refrigerate overnight or for several hours until set.

