

Healthy indulgence

Switch to healthy desserts this festive season that not only satiate your sweet cravings but also do not pile up calories

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Activated charcoal gulab jamun

It is that time of the year when festivities are in the air and cheat meals are not a once in a week affair. Desserts are a big part of the celebrations. However, the weighing scale post the party binge is likely to steal your smile away. So, here is a guide to make smart choices with desserts this season so that you can binge guilt-free.

Swap right

Whenever we talk about eating healthy, foregoing desserts is what comes to mind and it becomes harder when there is an abundance of sweets. The key issue in most desserts is the use of processed ingredients. “The use of fresh fruit versus preserves or jams is always a good idea. If you want to go for more indulgent sweets, look for home chefs creating small batches of such desserts. These home chefs tend to add the least possible number of additives and use homemade, good quality ingredients,” says Saloni Kukreja, founder, Food of Mumbai, a food blog. Chef Manoj Rawat, executive chef, Hilton Garden Inn, Gurgaon Baani Square, says, “We often use ingredients like low-fat yoghurt, soya milk, makhana (fox nut), daliya (broken wheat), jaggery, sesame seeds, quinoa, chia seeds, less sugar in desserts, use of fresh fruit juices as sweetener.” Incorporating healthy ingredients like unrefined sugar, fruits and whole grains can turn a dessert into a guilt-free delight. “Many people use a lot of artificial sweeteners in desserts which are not required at all; using ingredients like stevia, organic jaggery or even date syrup is just perfect to replace sugar in your dessert. You can even replace it with fruits (banana

or mango) that are naturally sweet,” says Vanshika Puri, The French Affair. We live in an era where people have become conscious of what they consume. “The fact that there is a demand for healthy products and substitutes, its supply is in plenty. Desserts can be given a healthier twist with use of simple substitutes—healthier sweeteners in place of sugar like stevia and play of dry fruits,” says chef Rohan, culinary director, Silver Beach Hospitality.

Go natural

Long before processed food entered the food chain, we used whole food and natural sources of sweeteners. When we become mindful of what we eat, we become mindful of how we cook it, too. Try substituting refined flours with alternate flours, such as whole wheat, millet flour and buckwheat flour. Likewise, preparing desserts with yoghurt instead of heavy cream is a good idea. It is natural and slight tartness adds an interesting contrast and balance to the sweetness of the overall dessert. “Dry fruit laddoos are a great example; made with ghee (which is beneficial for the body in cold weather) and using dates and figs for binding, it is one of the healthiest sweets. Wheat kheer is also an excellent dessert—it reminds me of winters back in our farm. Freshly ground wheat flour works best for this. The flour is roasted in ghee, mixed with boiled milk and tastes simply divine. Cane sugar and brown rice kheer is another favourite—it is full of healthy carbohydrates and fibre,” says chef Ranveer Brar, brand ambassador, Parag Milk Foods. Jitendra Awasthi, junior sous pastry chef, The Westin Mumbai Garden



Almond muesli ice cream

City says, “There are several examples where minimalistic cooking with right ingredient results in a healthy and nutritious dish. With healthy eating becoming a lifestyle, people are opting for multigrain energy bars and flour-less cookies as gifts during the festive season.”

Twist of health

Healthy desserts are gaining popularity nowadays. The use of alternative flours like coconut flour and almond flour are way healthier than refined flour and they taste really good, too. However, it does take some effort to make the shift. Rebekah Blank, brand head at Fabcafe by Fabindia, says, “It certainly takes some trial and error. Some ideas just never work out and some are amazing from the beginning. I love creating a dessert around a healthy fruit or vegetable, like a banana cake or a carrot cake around carrots and apples;

usually desserts that have their root in something natural come out quite well.” Eating healthy should be about enjoying everything in a balanced fashion. “This festive season we have introduced ‘mithai boxes’ which are created using the freshest, wholesome, natural and non-refined ingredients with our knowledge of combining these in a simplistic manner to satiate your cravings this Diwali. The specially curated box of plant-based sweets made with jaggery, khandsari sugar and lots of love to brighten up your day,” says Pallavii Gupta, partner, Santé Spa Cuisine. Using all-natural ingredients with no artificial colouring and preservatives is the key. “One of the challenges of creating such healthy desserts is pricing. Since we don’t cut corners for our ingredients and give the best quality in its natural form, the cost increases which consumers hesitate to pay,” says Malika Suri, founder



Ras malai cheesecake

Mimansa at Foxtrot. Ajay Markan, corporate chef, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts, says “We have different types of healthy seeds (pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, chia seeds, melon seeds) available which can enhance the nutritive value of the dishes, also there are lots of local grains available which can replace refined flours like ragi flour and nachni (finger millet) flour.”

Intelligent choices

Whether you are eating desserts after dinner or as an afternoon treat, it can be a part of a balanced diet as long as one pays attention to portion sizes and also opting for healthier options. It is a good habit to read the nutrition levels

Maple cinnamon apple sauce recipe

(Courtesy: Sheriyar Rustom Dotivala, executive chef, The Resort Mumbai)

Ingredients:

- ▶ Apples (sweet red apple)- 3
- ▶ Granny Smith or green apples- 3
- ▶ Real maple syrup- ¼ cup plus 2tbsp
- ▶ Ground cinnamon- 1tbsp
- ▶ Fresh lemon juice- 1tbsp
- ▶ A dash of sea salt

Method:

- ▶ Peel, core and chop the apples into 2-inch chunks. In a saucepan, over medium heat, combine the apple chunks, maple syrup, cinnamon and lemon juice. Cover and simmer for about 12 minutes, or until the apples have softened up a bit.
- ▶ Take off the lid of the saucepan and continue cooking, stirring occasionally to break up the larger chunks, until the apples are soft but still have some texture (5 to 10 minutes).
- ▶ Remove the saucepan from heat and, if necessary, add more maple syrup, cinnamon or lemon juice, to taste. Serve warm or chilled; let it cool to room temperature before storing it in the fridge.



Apple tart, courtesy Hyatt Centric, M.G. Road, Bengaluru

to choose the ingredients that provide some nutrients. It is always advisable to go natural with desserts. Usage of probiotic products makes an excellent choice of ingredients for desserts. Introduce more of nutrient-dense dessert options made with whole food ingredients. “A fruit bread, comprising strawberry, coconut, chia seeds and banana, can be made with healthy ingredients like organic strawberries,

chia seeds, Greek yoghurt, unsweetened almond and coconut milk with finger millet and water chestnut flour. Zucchini brownies can be made with sustainably grown zucchinis with a combination of dark chocolate with multigrain mix,” says chef Yash Mathur, executive sous chef, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway. Festivals are always a time for indulgence and considering that everyone



Quinoa coconut crumble pudding, courtesy Radisson Blu Atria, Bengaluru

achieved when you understand the characteristic of chosen ingredients and accordingly play with alternative ingredients. Chef Santhanam S., executive pastry chef, Radisson Blu Atria, Bengaluru, says, "While making desserts, we prepare some classic combination desserts with quinoa that can be easily replaced with whole

ragi, broken wheat or even with broken rice. Our flourless chocolate cake, for instance, is best for people who are allergic to gluten." One of the key propositions while making a healthy dessert is to pick the ingredients that are nutritionally balanced and then comes the check on the calorie count. Manish Uniyal, head chef,



Plant-based mithai

likes to finish on a sweet note, those are the biggest contributors to calories. "We use a lot of natural products as opposed to artificial sweetening or colouring. We have a special gluten-free Orange Cake, which is fresh, aromatic and zesty, and has now become a favourite of guests. Not only is the cake made without flour, but the colour and flavour comes from slow boiling

the orange peel over time to extract the essence out of the mixture. A great example of a truly natural, and guilt free dessert," says Calvet, executive chef, Four Seasons Hotel, Bengaluru.

Taste factor

Healthy desserts, however, do not mean a compromise on their taste or integrity of the recipe. This is best



Avacado chocolate mousse, courtesy Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway

Hyatt Centric, M.G. Road, Bengaluru, says, "With the market flooded with healthy eating options, it is not very difficult to choose the right ingredient for your dessert. The correct cooking techniques are key when it comes to retaining the goodness of ingredients." Matcha green tea, for instance, adds a healthy twist on traditional ice cream and is infused with antioxidants,

vitamins, and minerals like potassium, zinc and magnesium. "Consuming matcha also improves cognitive function, metabolism and cardiovascular health. It goes well with desserts and can be blended with chocolates," says Sahil Singh, head chef, Modern Pan Asian cuisine, Massive Restaurants Pvt Ltd. So, have fun munching on healthy desserts this festive season. □