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Sugar used wisely can be good for you

Sweet-tasting treats have been a source of pleasure for people for thousands of years.

Egyptian hieroglyphics described candy making more than 4,000 years ago. The Greeks combined flour with honey and fruits to make their candy while the ancient Chinese boiled a sweetened barley-and-water mixture to make the early version of hard candy.

Sugar is not just for candy and sweet treats but is used for a variety of products. Sugar continues to be attacked from all sides and blamed for a multitude of health problems. But, just like everything else, moderation is the key. Overindulgence in anything can be harmful to your body and health. Sugar consumed wisely can be enjoyable and beneficial.

During digestion, sugar is eventually broken down into simple sugars like glucose. Glucose enters the bloodstream and is carried to the cells where it is used for energy. Sugar is a simple carbohydrate and the most readily available form of energy that your body uses. Chemically, sugars are divided into three main groups. Monosaccharides, a simple single sugar; Disaccharides, a combination of two simple sugars; and Polysaccharide, many simple sugars strung together.

SUGAR HAS many names, as there are more than 100 sweet substances called sugar. Commonly found names are fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose and sucrose. Learn to read food labels to identify sugar and other sweeteners.

These other sweeteners appear on labels not only as sucrose but as dextrose, corn syrup, honey, molasses, maple syrup, brown sugar, corn sweeteners and invert sugar. Sugar is sugar, and the various forms are all four calories per gram and have no nutritional benefit one over the other, with the possible exception of molasses.

Breads, canned and dried soup, spaghetti sauce and TV dinners are just a few of the foods to which sugar has been added. The reason is that sugar makes food taste good. Sugar

is used in food preservation by addition during canning to increase firmness, discourage browning and add flavor. Large amounts of sugar prevents bacteria from growing in many products such as jam and jelly.

Sugar has a tenderizing effect on baked products, as it acts to change the protein in flour and egg white so it will not toughen during cooking. Sugar absorbs and holds moisture, so it prevents breads, cakes, pastries and other baked goods from drying out, thus prolonging shelf life.

Sugar turns a dark brown when heated and adds to the browning of baked foods. When fat and sugar are creamed together, air is incorporated into the mixture for a lighter product. Sugar also serves as food for the yeast breads to make the product rise.

WHEN YOU THINK of chocolate cake and the approximate 15 teaspoons of sugar per piece you may want to alter your recipe. Use recipes that require smaller amounts of sugar or sweeteners or reduce the amount. Cut back slowly on sugar with high-rising cakes and yeast breads; they need sugar for texture and height. In cookies, sugar contributes sweetness, makes the dough easier to spread and adds crispness. Replace some of the sweetness with flavorings such as cinnamon, vanilla, ginger, cloves, allspice, almond or peppermint.

Sugar has many other useful roles such as in leather tanning, textile sizing, charcoal briquettes, fire patches and shoe polish. Surprisingly, sugar also helps the cement industry. Sucrose is added when a slow-setting concrete or cement is needed. Soaking timber in a sucrose solution is believed to prevent shrinkage of wood. Clean your hands by rubbing sugar on them to remove grease, or add a little sugar to fresh-cut flowers to prolong their life.

In some areas even the medical community is using sugar for its healing powers on burns, gunshot wounds and other infections.

After cakes and chocolates, Beranbaum accents cookies

Just in time for the season that Rose Levy Beranbaum calls "the most enchanting time of the year" comes "Rose's Christmas Cookies" (William Morrow; \$19.95; \$7 full-color photographs).

Rose Levy Beranbaum has written two previous award-winning works, "The Cake Bible" and "A Passion for Chocolate." Now, in "Rose's Christmas Cookies," the rich and fragile little pastries that symbolize holiday sharing get the Beranbaum treatment.

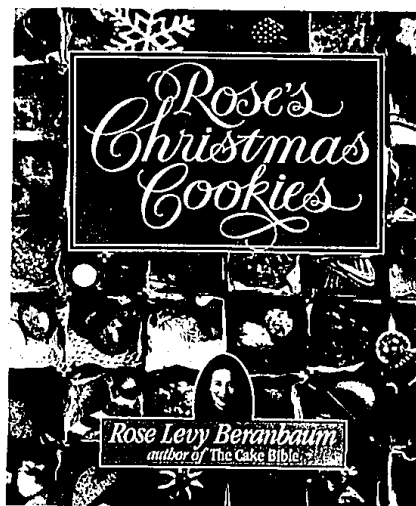
In seven chapters, each themed to one of the many ways cookies are featured at holiday time, "Rose's Christmas Cookies" serves up a combination of refined classics and Beranbaum creations. Easy cookies to make with the kids include Turfles and Cocoa Brownies; Tree cookies — as decorative to hang as ornaments — including Stained Glass Cookies and Gingerbread People; and icing-painted Traditional Rolled Christmas Sugar Cookies.

"Cookies for Giving as Gifts from the Heart" include Scotch Shortbread, Mexican Wedding Cakes, and even "Bone A Fidos," a crunchy treat for man's best friend. Cookies sturdy enough to send to loved ones far away include Pfefferkuchen and Mahogany Buttercrunch Toffee, while "Open House" cookies include Ginger Pennies, Cinnamon Cloud Nines, Moravian Spice Crisps and Cranberry Chocolate Chippers.

ELEGANT "COOKIES for Christmas Dinners" include Praline Torteau Cups, Moist Chocolate Madellines, Linzer Squares and Mini Cheesecakes with Lemon Curd or Cranberry Topping. Elegant Springers, rich Buchettes de Noel, spicy Lebkuchen, crunchy Madelbrot and the ultimate Rugelach spell yuletide treat in several languages.

As with any of Beranbaum's baking books, there is more to "Rose's Christmas Cookies" than perfected recipes. She includes information on why cookies require bleached rather than unbleached flour, the reasons for weighing rather than measuring ingredients, and why older egg whites make better meringues.

She also provides advice on how to store and ship cookies (pocorn makes an easy, inexpensive and edible packing material), and two final chapters — Ingredients and Equipment — to tell inquiring cooks everything they need to know about chocolate, flour and butter as well as cookie sheets, food processors and mixers.



"Rose's Christmas Cookies" by Rose Levy Beranbaum is loaded with recipes for holiday baking.

THREE-NUT FINGERS

Makes 32 cookies, each 2 inch by 1 1/4 inches

1/2 cup unbleached sliced almonds
1/4 cup pecan halves
1/4 cup whole hazelnuts
1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon (dip and sweep method) bleached all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons (firmly packed) light brown sugar
1/2 cup unsalted butter
1 1/2 teaspoons water
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Topping
1/4 cup superfine sugar

Equipment
Nonstick or buttered cookie sheets

This simple oval cookie seems so innocent. But put it in your mouth

and its dissolving texture with its fine crunch of nuts and intense depth of toasted nut flavor creates a close-to-obsessive craving.

Place 2 oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Place the nuts in separate piles on a cookie sheet and bake them, keeping the nuts separated by stirring occasionally for 10 minutes or until the almonds are lightly browned. With a large spoon, transfer the hazelnuts to a clean kitchen towel and wrap them with the towel. Allow them to sit for a few minutes. Use the towel to rub off as much peel as possible. Cool all the nuts completely.

Food Processor Method

In a small bowl, whisk together the flour and salt.

In a food processor with the metal blade, process the sugar with the

nuts until the nuts are powder fine. Cut the butter into a few pieces and add it with the motor running. Process until smooth and creamy. Add the water and vanilla extract and process until incorporated, scraping the sides of the bowl. Add the flour and pulse in just until incorporated.

Electric Mixer Method

Soften the butter. Grate the toasted nuts powder fine. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, nuts and salt. In a mixing bowl, cream the sugar and butter until light and fluffy. Beat in the water and vanilla extract until incorporated. On low speed, beat in the flour mixture until incorporated.

For Both Methods

Scrape the dough into a bowl. Measure the dough into a 1 1/4-inch cookie scoop or 2 level teaspoons. Shape the dough into dateline pieces (1 1/4 inches long by 1/4 inch wide) and place them on the cookie sheets 1 1/4 inches apart.

Bake for about 15 minutes or until lightly browned. For even baking, rotate the cookies sheets from top to bottom and front to back halfway through the baking period.

Allow the cookies to cool on the sheets for a few minutes. Use a small, angled metal spatula or pancake turner to lift the cookies from the sheets. Gently roll them in superfine sugar. Transfer the cookies to wire racks, and when cool, dip them a second time in the sugar.

Store: In an airtight container at room temperature or in the freezer. Keeps 1 month at room temperature, several months frozen.

Smart Cookie

• To make superfine sugar, process granulated sugar in the food processor for a few minutes or until it is as fine as you wish.

• Pecan halves are called for to ensure an accurate amount if you are using a measuring cup. Pecan pieces are fine to use if you weigh them.

• Allow the cookie sheet(s) to cool completely before using for the next batch.

• Distribute the cookies evenly around the cookie sheet. Avoid crowding the cookies into one section of the cookie sheet, leaving large areas bare.

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cense numbers of strange cars. They noted the times of odd behavior. They worked with each other. They worked with the police. Armed with field glasses, note pads and telephones, folks kept track of the neighborhood.

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