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Healthy Cooking: 14 Scary Recipe Ingredients

How to tame the dietary 'bad boys' lurking in your favorite recipes -- without sacrificing taste.

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WebMD Weight Loss Clinic - Expert Column

When it comes to healthy cooking, there are monsters lurking out there in our favorite recipes. These are ingredients that can be downright frightening to anyone trying to eat healthfully and cut calories. And yet for many of them, there's no perfect substitute -- such as for bacon, brie, bleu cheese, whipped cream, or browned butter.

Lisa Young, PhD, RD, a professor of nutrition at New York University and author of *The Portion Teller Plan*, believes the worst ingredients are those that are high in fat, particularly saturated fat, like butter.

"Fats have more calories per gram than carbs or protein, so they are the biggest weight loss offenders," she says.

The trouble is that sometimes, nothing but butter will do, says David Joachim, food writer and author of *The Food Substitutions Bible*. "Butter tastes like butter and nothing else," says Joachim. "Margarine? It's not even close!"

You can't "brown" margarine, for example. When butter is browned, its unmistakable, amazing caramelization flavors arise.

14 Scariest Recipe Ingredients

Of course, there's no need for butter to get all the bad press. There are at least a dozen common ingredients that should send up a red flag if you're watching fat and/or calories.

It's not unusual, for example, for a recipe to call for a quarter cup of mayonnaise per serving. That's 396 calories and 44 grams of fat -- and that's not including any other ingredient in the recipe.

It's also not unusual for soup, sauce, and dessert recipes to call for a quarter-cup of liquid heavy whipping cream per serving. That would add 205 calories and 22 grams of fat per serving, all by itself.

Light whipping cream is only a little better, with 174 calories and 18.5 grams of fat. Half-and-half is the best of the three, with 79 calories and 7 grams of fat per quarter cup. But if half and half is an ingredient in a cream soup, each serving could contain a cup -- which would add 300+ calories (and 28+ fat grams).

Two other popular fatty ingredients, says **Young**, are sour cream and cheese. "Using low fat or part skim varieties of these products really helps a lot," **Young** adds.

Puff pastry can also get you into trouble with artery-clogging trans fats. One serving of Pepperidge Farms Puff Pastry Shells has 5 grams of trans fats, and their Puff Pastry Sheets contribute 4 grams of trans fats per serving.

And the list doesn't stop there. Here are 14 common and super-scary recipe ingredients, along with the amount of calories, fat, and saturated fats you'll find in a typical serving:

<i>Ingredient</i>	<i>Common Serving</i>	<i>Calories</i>	<i>Fat (g)</i>	<i>Saturated Fat (g)</i>
Mayonnaise	1/4 cup	396	44	6.5
Bacon grease	2T	250	28	13
Heavy whipping cream (liquid)	1/4 cup	205	22	14
Puff pastry	2 ounces	312	22	3
Cheese (like cheddar)	2 ounces	228	19	12
Light whipping cream (liquid)	1/4 cup	174	18.5	11.5
Sausage, cooked	2 ounces	209	18	6.1
Bacon	4 strips	150	13	4.
Butter	1T	102	12	7.2
Sour cream	1/4 cup	123	12	7.5
Cheddar cheese, 1 oz	1/4 cup	115	9.4	6
Pie crust, 9-inch deep dish	1/8 slice	115	8	2
Half and half	1/4 cup	79	7	4.3

Healthy Cooking: Taming Bad Boy Ingredients in Recipes

So faced with all this, what's an aspiring healthy cook to do?

Experts say that your first option when confronted with bad boy ingredients in recipes is to ask yourself: Do I absolutely need the taste of this ingredient in this dish?

For example, when faced with a recipe calling for lots of butter, if the answer to the question is "no," you can switch to a less-fat margarine. Better yet, if the recipe calls for melted butter, you can usually use canola oil with no problem (and you can usually use less than the recipe requests).

If the answer to the taste question is "yes," think about using less butter than the recipe calls for and about what you can add to replace the butter you're taking out. If you use less butter in the sauté pan, for example, wine or broth can add moisture. If you use less butter in a bakery-type recipe, you can add fat-free sour cream, light cream cheese, vanilla yogurt, liqueur, pureed fruit, or even strong coffee to replace the lost butter.

The bottom line is that when it comes to "bad boy" ingredients in recipes, you have three ways to go:

1. If the ingredient is important to the flavor of the dish, use it -- but use less of it.
2. If the ingredient is important, try to balance it out by cutting fat and calories in other ways in the

recipe. For example, says Joachim, foie gras (goose or duck liver) is considered an irreplaceable featured ingredient in some culinary circles. "It's fatty, it's controversial, it's delicious, and there's no substitute," he says. So if your recipe calls for foie gras, butter and cream cheese, use foie gras -- but cut out the butter and switch to a light cream cheese.

3. If the ingredient is not necessary to the flavor of the dish, cut it out and/or switch to ingredients that are healthier and perhaps contain "smarter" fats.

SOURCES: David Joachim, author, Food Substitutions Bible. **Lisa R. Young, PhD, RD, professor of nutrition, New York University; author, The Portion Teller Plan.** ESHA Research, Food Processor II, Nutritional Analysis software.

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