

Heidi's Helpful Smoothie Tips and Tricks

Smoothies are a great way to get a nutrient dense meal or snack in a quick and convenient way that tastes delicious. Have fun with your creativity - sometimes the best smoothies don't involve or need a recipe!

How to build a smoothie:

Start with hard, chunky ingredients on the bottom such as dates, nuts and frozen fruit. They will need the most chopping and this way they are closest to the blade. Add in the rest of solid ingredients and then top with liquid. I like to add ice last.

The base - Usually a fruit, but don't forget the vegetables such as spinach and kale. Roasted butternut squash, or frozen broccoli, cauliflower and peas work well also.

Ice - Smoothies taste best cold and icy! If you're not using frozen fruit don't forget to add ice!

Liquids - Try to use a liquid that is unsweetened to avoid excessive amounts of sugar. Choose from water, nut milks, soy milk, coconut milk, coconut water, prepared tea (I like flavored green teas), or kefir.

Flavorings - take a smoothie from "meh" to WOW! Extracts (vanilla, mint, almond) citrus zest, fresh herbs (mint, basil, rosemary) spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom)

Adding creaminess - Avocado, banana, nuts and seeds, full fat yogurt, plant-based milks, rolled oats, mango, cooked squash, and coconut all help boost a smoothie's creaminess.

Sweeteners - a touch of natural sweetener can really perk up a smoothie and bring out the flavors - keeping in mind to use a very small amount! Lucuma is a low sugar powder that adds some sweetness and is also slightly creamy. Other choices would be raw honey, pure maple syrup, agave, dates or Stevia for a no sugar sweetener.

Protein - if you're drinking the smoothie as a meal, you will want to add some protein for satiety as well as maintaining muscle mass. Nuts, seeds, plain yogurt, kefir, tofu, soy milk and protein powders (either whey or plant-based) will all provide varying amounts of protein - the most coming from the powders.

Some other notes from the discussion:

Cold and ice can dull taste-buds, which is really good if you're trying to cover up some added vegetables! However, it can also make things taste less sweet. It's best to drink smoothies right away- they can develop some off flavors if left to sit around, especially the green smoothies!

One of the best proteins to build muscle is whey protein powder because it has all 9 essential amino acids, and is one of the highest biologically available forms of protein. However soy, hemp and pea protein contain all 9 essential amino acids as well so they are also good choices based on preference.

Non-dairy probiotics - Kombucha, soy or coconut yogurt, or coconut kefir.

Pros/Cons of vanilla (non-sweetened) soy milk - I love soy milk, so for me it's mostly pros! It has the same amount of protein as dairy milk and adds a really nice creaminess. Some cons would be that it has more calories and carbohydrates compared to other plant based milks.

Maca - a powdered root grown in the mountains of Peru. It is best known as an "adaptogen" which helps balance hormones and provide energy without being a stimulant. It has a lot of essential minerals and good source of some B vitamins. It's best paired with nuts, seeds, chocolate and fruits like dates, bananas and pear. It doesn't pair so well with vegetables and most other fruits!

Medicinal mushrooms-have medicinal benefits such as boosting the immune system and include mushrooms like Reishi, Lions' mane, Chaga, Maitake and Turkey Tail. The brand I like best is Four Sigmatic, and they also have a nice plant-based protein powder that includes the mushrooms. If you just use the plain mushroom powder, use it in a smoothie that contains a lot of strong flavors such as a chai smoothie.

Spirulina - is an algae that is one of the most nutrient dense foods on earth, gram for gram. It contains protein, minerals and functional compounds that provide antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. There are studies showing that spirulina can also stop viral replication, which is of particular benefit to us now!

Cacao - I like to use the cacao nibs to provide some chocolate flavor and crunch to smoothies without any added sugar. It's just pure chocolate! Studies show multiple benefits of cacao including high levels of antioxidants and minerals, as well as mood enhancing and heart health benefits.

Zinc - multiple studies suggest that zinc can inhibit viral replication. All nuts and seeds contain some zinc, but the best sources are cashews and hemp seeds. If you're taking a zinc supplement for an extended period of time it's important to get enough copper as well since high intakes of zinc interfere with copper absorption. The good news is that nuts, seeds, spirulina and dark chocolate all contain copper!