Swaps, Hacks, & Tips

Ideas for Swapping Ingredients in Recipes

Retrain Your Brain
If you think about it, the primary purpose of the Recipe Builder in the Weight Watchers App is to make us WANT to cook our food with less fat, calories, sugars and carbs. Every time you lower the point value of a recipe with ingredient swaps, you have cut at least one of those four things.

Lowering the Points for Butter

The Fat Free “cheese hack” lets you have melty cheese for an entire pan of Lasagna for only 4sp in total.

Molly McButter Fat Free Sprinkles
This stuff is amazing. It’s a fine powder that dissolves perfectly in liquids and gives the flavor and color of butter. You can use up to 1 teaspoon for 0 points. It’s a go-to staple in my kitchen for sauces.

I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter-Light
Don’t get one of the other types of I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter spreads. Make sure you get the one that says “Light” and scan it to make sure. It is a butter flavored spread that can be used perfectly in place of butter, but at a fraction of the points. A 1/4 cup is only 6sp, while 1/4 cup of real butter is 20sp. Perfect for when you MUST use butter, but need to reduce the points, calories, and fat.

ULTRA Low Point Pie Crusts

Ultra Low Point Pie Crust

Kellogg’s All-Bran or Fiber One
Traditionally, for a pie crust you’d use crushed up graham crackers. But the amount of graham crackers and butter for that is around 36-46sp. If you put All-Bran or Fiber One cereal in a food processor with a little bit of FF Yogurt and some 0 point sweetener (monkfruit, swerve, etc.) and sugar free maple syrup, along with some Molly Mcbutter or I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter Light, you can make an entire pie crust for only 7sp.

Yogurt For Oil In Cake Mixes

Fat Free Plain Greek Yogurt
Yogurt is a good substitute for mayo and sour cream in most recipes, though it can easily curdle when introduced into sauces or hot liquids. Let the liquids or dishes cool a bit before you bring the yogurts up to temperature and mix them in. You can also mix Greek into high point salad dressings to get more servings and lower the points.

Fat Free Plain Yogurt
I personally prefer to use Plain Yogurt as a substitute for sour cream, rather than Greek Yogurt, as it is thinner and more closely resembles the viscosity of oil.
Yogurt for Mayo and Dairy

**Fat Free Greek & Plain Yogurt**

Along with being used to sub for oil in baking, you can also use FF Yogurts to sub for mayo, sour cream, milk and even cream in different applications. Use it instead of cream or milk with mashed cauliflower, sub it for mayo in dips and dressings and with a few tests, you can even use it as a sub for cream in certain sauces. Just don’t add it to very hot liquids and dishes without tempering it or it will curdle.

Fresh Pasta to the Rescue

**Don’t Give Up Your Pasta!!!**

Unless you’re on the Purple plan, pasta is your sad emoji. Yes, there’s store bought pasta that’s crazy-high in carbs and points, not to mention it’s a pain in the booty to portion easily. Well, rejoice! Using the recipe on page 40-43, I’ll show you how real, fresh pasta is lower in carbs, calories, points and is easier to portion than store bought pasta. Not to mention it tastes 10,000 times better than that dried stuff you buy for $1.

Substitutions for Honey

**How To Swap Out Bee Puke.**

As delicious and complex a flavor as honey is, it is also very high in points and sugars. There are a few options for getting around it though. 

#1, Sugar Free Pancake Syrup. The flavor profile is different, but it is sweet, thick and a lot lower in points. 

#2, Sugar Free Imitation Honey. You can purchase it online, pretty cheap through Walmart. However, it is barely lower point than real honey and only has 10 less calories per Tablespoon, still a good option for diabetic folks though. 

#3, Honey Flavored Extract. Just like Vanilla extract, but made to taste like honey. You can purchase it cheap online. I like to bring 1/2 cup of water, 1-1/2 tsp of cornstarch, 1 tsp of the extract and some sweetener to a low boil for 3-4 minutes. Once cooled, you get 1/4 cup of thick “honey”.

Low Point Breading for Meats & Veggies

**Non Traditional Breading Ideas**

Store bought breadcrumbs pack a pretty high point punch. Want lower point bread crumbs? Try Mashed potato flakes, or crushed rice krispies, whole wheat cheerios, or corn flakes. There’s also the obvious fix... buy low point bread, like Sara Lee 45 calorie, 1 point slices, then make your own crumbs.

Osp Italian Sausage, Chorizo, & More

**with Seasoned Ground Turkey**

Don’t get me wrong, I like beef... but ground beef is expensive, is high in points and sits in my gut like a brick. I’ve spent a LOT of time developing ground meat seasonings (pgs 26-31), that allow you to have low point, calorie and fat, chorizo, Italian sausage, bratwurst and more. It’s an incredibly tasty way to cut calories from your meals, without really losing much in the way of that dish’s traditional flavor. Give the recipes a try, you won’t regret it.

Quickly “Ripen” Yellow Bananas

**Sweeten up those baked goods**

Ever tried to make a banana bread or another baked item that calls for “very ripe” bananas, but all that you have are the firm yellow ones without a fleck of black on them? Here’s a quick fix. Throw the firm bananas (in their skin) onto a pie pan, and bake them at 325 degrees for 15-20 minutes, then let it cool.

Melting Fat Free Cheese Hack

**Fat Free Mozzarella & Cheddar**

This is a game changer. Using this hack you can “cheese” an entire pan of Lasagna with 2 cups (really 3) of melty Mozzarella for only 4sp. The biggest problem with FF cheese is that it doesn’t melt. That problem is solved if you mix it with a bit of FF plain (or Greek) yogurt. Sounds wrong, but it’s amazing. Mix any amount of Kraft (or other brand) Fat Free shredded cheese with about 3/4 as much FF plain yogurt and mix until it forms a cheesy goopy mixture. Use it on Chicken Parmesan, Lasagnas or stuffed in a chicken breast. It works like a charm.

Pudding without Milk or Yogurt

**Thickening without Dairy or Fat**

It’s one of the annoying things about pudding, it just won’t thicken if you use water, soy milk, almond milk or whatever. Well, that’s not the case. If you use HALF as much of a non fatty fluid as the directions call for milk, it works. If you want it to have the consistency of regular pudding, use 1 cup of COLD liquid in place of the 2 cups milk. If you are wanting it thick enough to where it can keep its shape for a frosting, use 2/3 cup. So, use (1) 1oz packet of instant pudding and 1 cup cold water for pudding or 3/4 to 2/3 cup for frosting.
Potato Substitutes

0sp Potato Alternatives
A few months back I got determined to have a big bowl of nacho cheese fries. Only one problem, potatoes are very high in points. I spent days combing through low carb cooking sites and compiled a short list of what people on low carb diets use to sub for potatoes. I then went about trying out the different veggies. The following are listed in no particular order.

Rutabaga & Radish
Rutabaga is a root vegetable that falls into the same family as broccoli, brussel sprouts and kale. Once it’s washed and peeled, a rutabaga’s orange flesh is similar in texture and flavor to a turnip. As for Radish, you normally only see them as a raw garnish. In their raw form, they are bitter and spicy. However, when you cook them, they mellow out and take on a more potato-like texture. Plus they are full of nutrients.

Celery Root (listed as “celeriac” in the App)
Celeriac has a mild celery flavor and is often used as a flavoring in soups and stews. It can also be used on its own, usually mashed, or used in casseroles, au gratins and baked dishes. It has a naturally savory flavor.

Jicama
Jicama resembles a large light-brown colored turnip. The white, creamy interior has a very crisp texture somewhat similar to a firm apple or raw potato. Cooking jicama or serving it raw are equally tasty ways to prepare this lightly sweet root

Pureed/Mashed Fruit & Veggies in Cake

More alternatives to oil in baking
As well as using fat free plain yogurt like we mentioned earlier, no sugar added and pureed fruits and vegetables are perfect 1:1 swaps in baking for most, if not all, of the recommended liquid ingredients listed on boxed cake mixes. Make sure to scan labels first though, as some brands DO add sugar.

DIY Self Rising Flour

Perfect for Gluten Free folks
Members with Gluten sensitivities have a rough time with a lot of recipes, especially the 2 ingredient dough that we all know and love. Simply add 1 1/2 teaspoons of baking powder and 1/4 teaspoon of salt to every 1 cup of WHATEVER flour you would like to use. Whether it’s gluten free, whole wheat, cornmeal or any type of flour you want. Simply use that formula and you’ll have your own self rising flour.
Replacing Heavy Cream

**Thickening soups, sauces, gravies**
One of the most annoying things about “normal” recipes is how much heavy cream goes into EVERYTHING. I don’t use cream or half and half in ANY of my recipes. How do I thicken sauces and soups? I use cornstarch, heated with almond, nonfat, or low carb milk. You can also try powdered milk, silken tofu, potato flakes, xanthan gum, tempered Greek yogurt... heck, you can even use canned pumpkin puree or blended white beans to act as a thickener agent. Ground oatmeal works on the Purple plan too.

Flavored Cooking Sprays Instead of Oil

**Obvious, but deserves a shout-out**
I personally use a TON of butter flavored cooking spray. When seasoning raw meats, I hit both sides with butter flavored or olive oil flavored cooking spray to help flavor the meat. You can also use the butter spray on popcorn. Use the olive oil spray to lightly hit the top of homemade low point hummus or other dishes instead of drizzling olive oil on them. There are tons of ways to use flavored sprays as a seasoning.

Fat Free & Reduced Fat Cheeses

**The Hard To Find Ingredient**
It’s obvious that you should swap full fat cheese for reduced fat cheese, however, there’s another variety that you can try... if you can find it. Fat Free cheese. You can “cheese” an entire Lasagna with my fat free cheese hack for 4 points versus 19 points for reduced fat cheese. Kraft Fat Free cheese can usually be found, pretty reliably, at most Walmart grocery stores.

Powdered Peanut Butter

**Dehydrated and nearly Fat Free PB**
Powdered peanut butter, regardless of the brand, is freaking awesome. You can mix it with water to rehydrate it for use as regular peanut butter or you can add the powder to recipes and baked goods to give a PB flavor without all the added mass, points, or stickiness. It’s great in everything from smoothies to satay sauces, baking mixes or mixed with pudding or yogurt. The best part being that it’s a fraction of the points of regular peanut butter. Allergic to peanuts? There’s powdered Almond butter.

Flavored Popcorn Seasonings

**They Ain’t Just For Popcorn!!**
Want a wide range of low calorie, low point, non traditional flavor seasonings that pack a TON of punch? Go to the popcorn aisle at the store and take a look at all the flavors of popcorn sprinkles. Scan them to see the points, but you can use them to flavor desserts, sauces, appetizers... there is a TON of different flavors and brands. My cheese sauce, later in the book, calls for Molly McBudder brand cheese powder. You can use one of these though. Every store has them.

Dairy Free Yogurt Hack

**Go Go Gadget, TOFU!**
When I first started posting recipes for Greek yogurt based salad dressings, then began using strained Greek yogurt instead of Fat Free cream cheese in my frostings... people started asking about something I’d never thought of before. What to use instead of Greek, when you’re allergic to dairy?

Greek yogurt is such a huge building block of so many things in system. 2 Ingredient dough, breakfast parfaits, using it in place of sour cream... heck, I even use it to replace Lard in my Tamale. It made me start looking around for an easy alternative. I found one, it works, but it’s a bit unconventional. Tofu. Yup... that’s right. It’s readily available at grocery stores, inexpensive, and doesn’t have a strong flavor (unlike Greek). It comes in different levels of firmness. Firm, which you can dent a Buick with. Semi or Medium Firm, which is like a cooled block of cream cheese, then Silken (or soft), which is almost like Plain yogurt.

I blend a 16 ounce block of semi firm tofu with 1/2 cup water, to make a viable replacement for Greek yogurt. It works for 2 ingredient dough and salad dressings. It does “thicken” up a bit in the fridge though, so add more water if necessary. If you want that tang that Greek has, add a splash of lemon juice. After you blend it, you can also strain it again, like my Fat Free "cream cheese", to use it in frostings. Does it taste the same as Greek? No, but it’s a great alternative, if you have allergies. It works.

Fat Free “Cream Cheese”

**Seriously...it’s simple**

By using cheese cloth, or paper coffee strainers, to strain Greek yogurt overnight, it takes on the texture of softened cream cheese. On the Blue and Purple plans, it has absolutely no points, on Green, just count it as Greek. It can be used in spreads, dressings, dips and even frostings for cakes and cupcakes. An alternative for Green that I personally haven’t tried, but have heard good things about, is to run fat free cottage cheese in a food processor to make it smooth, then strain it just like you would the Greek yogurt.
Laughing Cow Cheese Wedges

Low Point & Calorie Spread
I haven’t personally used it, but so many people swear by these spreadable cheese wedges, that I HAD to include them. They are great as a 1 point cheesy snack, but their creamy consistency also makes it a great substitution for mayonnaise. You can mix it in with tuna or an egg salad sandwich, use it simply as a spread on toast or a bagel, or in an other application you might use light mayo or soft cream cheese.

DIY Low Point Brown Sugar Substitute

A Little Molasses Goes a Long Way
First off… YES… I know that you can buy 0 point brown sugar substitutes. Popular ones are Lakota brand “golden” monkfruit, Splenda makes an artificial brown sugar, Swerve, Sukrin Gold, there’s a lot of them. However… I can’t find them in the grocery stores by my house and I don’t want to order them online.

Luckily there’s an easy fix. Real brown sugar is simply regular sugar mixed with a little molasses. Well, if you have molasses and any type of sweetener, you can sub it in recipes. 1/4 tsp of molasses is 0 points. If I’m making a dish that calls for 1/4 cup or less of brown sugar, I’ll use that much sweetener, then add the 1/4 tsp molasses to the dish. It tastes great. Feel free to use more, but adjust your points accordingly.

Stretch The Servings with Low Point Fillers

Recipe Building 101
Your recipe has a certain amount of points in it. If that recipe makes 2 servings, it’ll be twice the points as if it made 4 servings. By bulking up a dish with 0 or low point vegetables or proteins (depending on your plan), you can drastically increase the servings and decrease the points. Pictured to the left, is my awesome pasta salad recipe. I use my Ricotta Gnocchi recipe for the pasta, use sliced, grilled chicken breast for the meat, have it loaded with a TON of roasted 0 point vegetables and wilted spinach, then I have it dressed with some of my low point roasted garlic and onion salad dressing. The points from the ricotta gnocchi get stretched out with a BUNCH more servings, by adding the vegetables and chicken. It stretches the 10 points of ricotta gnocchi and 2 points of my dressing to make enough pasta salad for (6) 1 cup servings. So that gives us an entire cup of freakin’ GOURMET gnocchi pasta salad, loaded with grilled vegetables, chicken, wilted spinach and creamy roasted garlic and onion dressing… for just 2 points per serving… on the Blue and Purple plans anyways. It’d be more on Green, because of the added points for greek yogurt in the dressing and the chicken. But it’d still be, amazingly low calorie, fat and point. Even if you’re on #TeamItsAlrightEasyBeingGreen.

Purple Plan Pasta & Flour Conundrums

Let the ridiculous WW-Math begin!!
As of today’s date (11-14-19), there is one bit of nonsense in the Purple plan, that you can take liberties with until they clarify it.
Ok… whole wheat flour, garbanzo or chickpea flour, black bean flour… pretty much all flours have points. However, whole wheat, chickpea, black bean and pretty much ALL types of pasta NOT made from white flour… are all 0 points on the purple plan. 1 cup of whole wheat flour is 12 points. Use that 1 cup of flour with some eggs and baking powder to make bread? It’s 12 points. Use that 1 cup of flour with eggs and NO baking powder to make fresh whole wheat pasta?… 0 points. Say whaaaaaaa?? So, apparently on the purple plan, once you turn non-white flour… flour…into pasta, it magically loses all of its points. Make crackers or bread with it? It keeps them. So ya know what I say? Take my fresh pasta recipe and substitute the all purpose flour with whole wheat flour. You may need to adjust the amount of liquid, because different flour types absorb water differently, but you Purple People Eaters can make your own fresh, delicious, 0 point pasta with my recipe and the 1 single flour swap. The funny thing is… you can bake my pasta dough to make whole wheat bread, by adding baking powder. It would have points, as bread. Boil it as pasta? Same calories, same carbs… no points. Try wrapping your coconut around that one.

Substitutions For Food Allergies

Just a few to consider
I’m going to be mentioning a bunch of stuff in here, so let’s quit with the bantering.
Allergic to peanuts but need a little peanut butter in a recipe? Puree some garbanzo beans. The flavor’s a little different, but it’ll work. If you can have sesame seeds, add up to 1/4 tsp sesame oil to the puree.

Allergic to eggs? replace 1 egg in a baked good with 1/4 cup of pumpkin puree or mashed banana. Add a little baking powder if you want to help add a little lift. Bob’s Red Mill makes certified Gluten Free All Purpose Flour that already has xantham gum and other binders in it to help fortify the flour. If you are making a Greek Yogurt based creamy dressing and are allergic to dairy, blend tofu with water. If you want to make one of my cake recipes, that are based on Pillsbury Sugar Free cake mixes, but you’re allergic to gluten or splenda, “Swerve” makes a gluten free, sugar free cake mix, that is sweetened with erythritol. Also, “Namaste” brand baking mixes has a ton of ALL allergen free mixes, though they are a little higher in points (not sugar free).
Low-ish Point and Calorie Milk & Cream Alternatives

Because of calories and points, I don’t really use regular milk or cream in ANYTHING. I pretty much use almond milk, soy milk, or CARBMaster brand (from Kroger stores) lactose-free milk in everything. They are all extremely low in points and calories, but equally as important, they are all THICKER THAN REGULAR MILK, which makes them ideal for helping to thicken pudding and sauces.

My coconut cupcakes and cake, call for “coconut flavored beverage”, rather than canned, Light coconut milk. I use Silk or So Delicious brands, because they are 2 points for an entire cup of thick and light coconut milk. If your local store doesn’t have them (they can be found by the almond milk), you can most likely find an almond/coconut milk blend that you can use in its place. If you are allergic to nuts and can’t use almond milk in one of my recipes that calls for it, use ANY low point and calorie milk you can find. Carbmaster is my top pick though.

Stevia, Truvia, Monkfruit & Erythritol-Based Sweeteners

Whether people agree with me or not about using them… I have absolutely no problem whatsoever with using Sweeteners."They aren’t natural!" There are plenty of natural sweeteners that are NOT white sugar. My personal favorite is Lakanto brand monkfruit. I have to warn you on one though…”Monkfruit in The Raw" brand is mixed with maltodextrine, it has the worst artificial aftertaste ever, in my opinion. Putting “in the raw” behind monkfruit on that package, is horribly misleading. Organic Stevia is a 100% natural sweetener, that even the 2 old men from the puppets can’t honestly complain about.

My primary reason for using them is calories. First and foremost, I am most concerned with using anything I can to cut calories from my recipes, without cutting flavor or portion sizes. Using sweeteners instead of sugar, if you have no food sensitivities to them, is a no brainer. 1 cup of sugar has nearly 800 calories… you’d be hard pressed to find any recipe for a sweet bread, pie, or cake, that doesn’t require 2 cups of it. By contrast, an entire cup of most sweeteners has 0 calories. I didn’t get fat by eating sweetener, and I’m not about to give up desserts or eat tiny portions.

Different Types of Thickeners

Though I must admit that in my recipes, I typically only use cornstarch, I wanted to make sure to point out other commonly available ingredients that you can also experiment with.
- Cornstarch: A little bit goes a long way. You can go up to 1-1/2 tsp of cornstarch for 0 points, and up to around 1 Tbsp for only 1 point. Dissolve it in a tiny bit of liquid, then heat it up in a sauce or soup and let it simmer for a few minutes. It will thicken the sauce and you won’t need as much of it as you would flour. The typical ratio that I like to use, is 1-1/2 tsp of cornstarch for each 3/4 cup liquid to thicken. Cornstarch is also Gluten Free.
- Xanthum Gum: Thickens just as well as cornstarch, but it doesn’t need to be heated. You can use it to thicken cold liquids, like salad dressings.
- Gelatine: Great for jellies, gravies, and clear glazes.
- Potato Starch: Works just as well as cornstarch, but some folks like it better.
- Guar Gum: I don’t have much experience with it, but it’s readily available at stores.

Ground Oatmeal

I haven’t done this, because I’m still on the Blue plan, but folks in Purple have mentioned that they will crush and grind up oatmeal, then will use it in place of bread crumbs, or as a thickening agent, for 0 points.