



Ask the Nutritionist

Sandy Sarni, MS, RD,
MIIA's Integrative Nutrition Coordinator

Dear Sandy,

What is Monk Fruit and Can I Use it for Baking Instead of Sugar?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. There has been a lot of interest in monk fruit recently. Monk fruit is a small, round fruit native to southern China. It gets its name from the Buddhist monks who grew it centuries ago. It is produced by removing the seeds and skin of the fruit, crushing the fruit, and then filtering and extracting it into liquid, or granulated forms. The fruit is naturally sweet, it's almost 200 times sweeter than sugar.

Monk fruit has been approved by the FDA and is categorized as Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS). Although it has been given the green light, there is very little research and should be used carefully with children and pregnant women. Monk fruit has no calories and a low glycemic index, which means it doesn't raise blood sugar. If you have diabetes, monk fruit could be a good option for you but first check with your health care provider.

During the production of monk fruit sweeteners, monk fruit extract is often blended with erythritol

to increase bulk for the purpose of baking. It also makes it look more like table sugar. Erythritol is a sugar alcohol, that contains zero calories but can cause bloating and an upset stomach in some people. Monk fruit can replace sugar in a number of ways. It stays stable at high temperatures, making it perfect for baking. However, a recipe that uses monk fruit sweeteners in place of sugar may turn out slightly different because sugar plays several roles in recipes related to volume and texture. Check labels to know how to substitute monk fruit for sugar.

Monk fruit can now be found in most grocery stores. Several brands, such as Monk Fruit In The Raw®, Lakanto®, SPLENDA® Monk Fruit Sweetener, SweetLeaf® and Whole Earth® use monk fruit sweeteners in granular and liquid forms.

MIIA's Well Aware program is offering a Zoom session on using monk fruit as a sweetener in baking. Heidi Roth, RD, will provide useful information and a cooking demonstration. Tune in on Wednesday, November 30th, 4:00 pm, to learn more!

