

Banana Chocolate Chip Cake Bars

Lauren's Note: I've made these bars twice now, and they were gone within 3 days both times – that's how good they are! Even my brother (who is skeptical of healthy treats and any gluten free food) gave these bars his approval! If you've got a brown banana, I recommend trying this recipe!

Ingredients:

- 1 ripe banana, mashed
- 1 cup all-purpose flour (or gluten free 1:1 flour)
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- 2 tbsp milk of choice
- 1/3 cup coconut sugar or brown sugar or stevia*
- 3 tbsp melted butter
- 1 tsp baking powder
- chocolate chips

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Mix all ingredients in a bowl, adding chocolate chips last.
3. Pour mixture into a parchment paper-lined or greased 8x8 baking dish (it probably won't take up the whole pan). Top with extra chocolate chips.
4. Bake for 20-25 minutes (use the toothpick test to determine if they're done).
5. Let cool, slice, and enjoy!

Note:

*I used about 1/4 cup stevia and 1 tbsp coconut sugar

Restaurant Swaps

Just because you're going out to eat (or ordering in), doesn't mean that your meal can't be healthy. While there's nothing wrong with ordering what you truly want from a restaurant menu (even if that's a burger with a side of fries especially when you eat healthy most of the time—again moderation!!), you also may feel lost looking at a restaurant menu and trying to find a healthy option amongst all the greasy and fried options. That's why this week I am sharing some tips on how to find (or make your own) healthy options at a restaurant!

Appetizers

While appetizers are delicious, one of the biggest changes you can make to have a healthy meal and keep your calories in check while eating out is to skip the apps. Appetizers often aren't the healthiest options on the menu (think loaded nachos, wings, fried foods, etc), and they aren't even your actual meal! Even be wary of ordering your actual meal from the appetizer selection when trying to eat healthier. We often think the appetizers are smaller and therefore a healthier option than a full meal. Depending on what you're ordering this may be true, but given that appetizers are often meant to be shared, the portions may be bigger than if you'd ordered an actual meal because the dish is meant to serve more than one person.

Salads

It's very rare that a restaurant doesn't have any salads on the menu (I would venture to guess that every restaurant has at least one salad but there are probably a few out there that don't). Salads may seem like the obvious healthy choice at a restaurant—and they often are—but be aware of what all the toppings are and which dressing you get because the calories and fat can add up. Opt for grilled over breaded fish or chicken as a protein choice and lighter dressings like vinaigrettes over creamy ranch or caesar dressings. You can also ask for your dressing on the side so that you decide how much to put on instead of the salad coming out of the kitchen already drenched in 3 servings worth of dressing. With the dressing on the side, you can just stick your fork into the dressing before each bite of salad to get the flavor without eating too much dressing. Additionally, if a salad has avocado on it, mashing it up a little bit can serve as a sort of dressing as well!

Burgers and Sandwiches

Just because you want to get a juicy burger or fancy sandwich at a restaurant doesn't mean you can't make some small swaps to make it healthier! You can ask for no bun or a lettuce bun; you could get the bun but take off the top (or not eat the whole entire bun), which is what I often do. You can also eat half the burger or sandwich right away and save the other half (see the section about getting a box!). Pay

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attention to what other toppings come on your burger or sandwich other than the meat, lettuce, tomato, and onion. While sometimes the sauce or unique topping is what draws you to order the option you do, the toppings may take away from you savoring the burger or sauce that you really enjoy. So instead of losing the full taste of what you really want, ask to take off one or two of the toppings you don't care for to save some calories. Additionally, opt for grilled poultry and fish and lean beef over fried and fattier options if you're looking for healthier options.

Sides

If you want to treat yourself to some fries when you go out to eat, that's totally fine. But if you want other options, here are some tips: ask for a different side! Most restaurants offer other options for sides and even if it's not clearly marked on the menu, it will not hurt to ask if you could substitute a side salad or sautéed veggies or a fruit cup, etc. And if you still want a potato-based side that's not fries, many restaurants offer a baked potato as a side. Rice pilafs are also a great substitution as a whole grain, complex carb if that's a choice! When I go out to eat, I generally substitute my fries for something else or order an entrée that doesn't come with a side since I don't want a whole order to myself, but I can steal a few from one of my family members to satisfy my taste for them. That is an option as well!

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Breakfast

In my opinion, going out to eat for breakfast is one of the greatest joys in life, so most of the time I'll order whatever strikes me most from the menu, even if it isn't the healthiest option I could go for. But if you find that you just want something a little lighter as your first meal of the day, there are many ways to make that family breakfast/brunch a little healthier. One of the most underrated rated "tricks" I've learned to use when I want a smaller breakfast when I go out to eat is to order from the a la carte/sides portion of the menu. Instead of ordering the big egg combo meal that I only want half of, I order 1 or 2 eggs a la carte and a slice of toast or some potatoes or a fruit cup. Additionally, many breakfast places offer fresh fruit cups as a substitute for potatoes or other side items to your breakfast dish. While I absolutely LOVE potatoes in pretty much any way, shape, or form, sometimes I just don't want a whole order. So I use a similar trick as with the fries above: I order fresh fruit or some other lighter side for myself, and then steal a bite or 2 of potatoes from someone else in my family. This trick doesn't work all the time obviously, but if you're with others you'd be comfortable sharing food with, I definitely recommend this so that you can satisfy your desire for a more unhealthy food without feeling overstuffed or guilty afterwards for eating the whole plate!

Sharing is Caring

If you're with someone that you're comfortable sharing food with and you both aren't super hungry, sharing is caring!! Why both get a big entrée that you're not hungry for and pay more for when you could share one big entrée and both be satisfied?! You could order a sandwich and fries that you split in half right away (or ask that the kitchen split it into two portions), so you can both enjoy the meal without having a whole portion to yourself that may leave you feeling guilty or overly full.

The Power of a Box

Remember that you can take your food home!! One of the biggest tips I can recommend for portion control when eating out is to cut your food in half right when you get it, and take a break from eating once you finish that half. Ask yourself, "Am I full? Do I need to eat this other half or will that just lead to me feeling overstuffed?" It usually takes 5-15 minutes for your body to recognize that it is actually full after you've eaten. If you are still hungry after a few minutes, you can eat the other half of your meal (or half of the other half or however much you want of the half); if you aren't still hungry, ask for a box so you can enjoy the rest of your food at another time. Just because you don't finish all the food on your plate doesn't mean it has to be wasted, if this is a concern for you to finish the whole plate. I've also heard the tip to immediately ask for a box when your food comes out, so you can put the other half of the

meal immediately away for later. I haven't personally tried this, but I think it would definitely help if you're concerned you won't be able to stop and check in with yourself at halfway.

Note: one last reminder that I am NOT saying you HAVE to eat healthy when you go to a restaurant! If you really want that burger or fries or wings or whatever it is: order it! Especially if you follow a mostly healthy diet at home and stay active (which you do if you go to Donna's classes!)! But if you do want to find healthier options at restaurants but feel lost at where to start: that's what these tips are for!

