

Building a Better *Smoothie*

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Smoothies are a refreshing meal, snack, or treat that can come together in a matter of minutes. The endless flavor combinations come with a variety of vitamins, minerals, and other important nutrients. Knowing a few basic steps gives you the flexibility to make a smoothie without a recipe and with ingredients you may have in your home. Follow this general guide to building a better smoothie.

Building a Smoothie without a Recipe

When making a smoothie, consider three basic parts: the base, the bulk, and the boost. Knowing these three parts will allow you to build smoothies with whatever ingredients you have on hand.

Base

You should add the base first. It is the liquid or creamy part of your smoothie that will help the ingredients to blend. The base will affect the texture of the smoothie. Often, a smoothie only needs one type of base to get your recipe started, but don't be afraid to combine options. As a general rule of thumb, start with a small amount because you can always add more.



Using dairy-based ingredients, such as milk or yogurt, can increase the protein content of your smoothie while giving it a smooth, creamy texture. Here are a few ideas:

- **Low-fat or skim milk:** This is a great foundation to use with frozen fruits or vegetables to keep the consistency smooth. This base will make the smoothie thinner and easier to drink. If you are lactose intolerant, lactose-free milks can provide the same nutritional benefit and texture.



A good starting point for a smoothie begins with the equation below.

1 cup base + 1.5 cups bulk + boost to taste = the foundation of one delicious smoothie

- Now you get to be the chef. Add more of what you want, or don't, for your smoothie.

- **Greek yogurt**, yogurt, and cottage cheese: These ingredients will thicken the smoothie and make a creamier texture while providing extra protein. Look for options at the store with low added sugar and probiotics to increase the nutritional value of your smoothie.

Many people choose to not eat or drink dairy products. There are several nondairy options to use as a base in your smoothie.

- **Nondairy milks:** Almond, soy, oat, rice, and coconut milks are some of the most common nondairy milk alternatives. These options help mimic a creamy consistency. Choose unsweetened options, when available.
- **100% fruit or vegetable juices:** Look for options that are labeled as 100% juice with low to no added sugar. Smoothies made with fruit juices tend to have a higher sugar content because of the natural sugars found in fruits. Use a fruit juice base with vegetable ingredients to reap the benefits with a fun flavor.

- **Water:** Keep it simple and reach for your sink! Water is a convenient, affordable, and simple option to blend with many flavor options for your smoothie.

Bulk

The bulk is the biggest part of the smoothie, and you add it to the blender second. You can add fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables here. This is where most of the flavor, color, and texture comes from. Fruits will make a sweeter smoothie while vegetables can give a heartier taste, but often the fruit masks their flavor. Fruits and vegetables also add fiber, vitamins, and minerals. A smoothie is a great way to increase how many fruits and vegetables you eat in a day.

Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before using them in your smoothie. Consider chopping larger fruits and vegetables into smaller pieces to allow them to blend easier. Keeping the peel on will add additional fiber with appropriate fruits and vegetables such as apples, pears, and cucumber. Opt for canned fruits and vegetables in 100% juice or

water without added sugar or sodium. You can buy prechopped frozen fruits and vegetables to reduce preparation time. Be mindful that frozen foods will make a thicker smoothie, so you could thin it out with a liquid base.

Boost

Finally, add the boost. The boost can provide additional nutrients, give flavor, or add a crunch. Canned or cooked beans are a great way to thicken a smoothie and add protein. Incorporating oats can thicken the smoothie and add fiber helping you to feel fuller for longer. Peanut butter and other nut butters will give a nutty flavor and increase the protein and fat content. Flax seeds, chia seeds, and hemp hearts can add a fun texture while boosting nutrients like fiber, protein, and healthy fats. Consider other items that may be in your pantry as ways to add flavor. For example, cinnamon, vanilla, honey, or cocoa powder can create a new flavor combination with common fruits and vegetables.

Become a Smoothie Expert

Consider these additional tips for making smoothies. In no time, you will be a smoothie specialist.

- Add overripened fruits and vegetables you may not want to eat whole to a smoothie. Over time, this can be a way to reduce food waste and save food dollars in your home.
 - There are single-serving blenders on the market that are typically less expensive than a true blender. You can also buy blenders second hand or refurbished and they are typically discounted around the holiday season. If you do not have a blender, you can make smoothies in a food processor as well.
 - Smoothies are best if enjoyed right after you prepare them. If you have leftovers, you can eat smoothies within 24 hours as long as you have stored them in an airtight
- container in the refrigerator. You can also pour leftovers into an ice tray with a toothpick or in a popsicle tray to freeze and enjoy later as a treat.
 - Depending on the ingredients, smoothies can be an easier way to take in calories when eating a meal may be difficult. This is an important consideration during sickness, if someone is managing a chronic condition, or needs to gain weight.
 - There are store-bought smoothie options that may seem more convenient. These options are typically more expensive, high in added sugar, and less nutritious than homemade. At home, you can add what you want and save food dollars at the same time.
 - You may have heard of a “juice cleanse.” When you juice a fruit or vegetable, you are removing fiber and most micronutrients with it. Smoothies include all the nutritional benefits, like fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals that you only get when you eat the entire fruit or vegetable.



- With the right ingredients, smoothies can be a balanced meal. Add multiple food groups to your smoothie to meet nutrient needs. For example, a smoothie made with yogurt, strawberries, a banana, spinach, and oats provides nutrients from the dairy, fruit, vegetable, and grain food groups.
- To make cleanup a breeze, rinse your blender immediately after using to prevent foods from drying and hardening. Then, when you're ready to clean, fill the blender or food processor halfway up with water, add a dash of dish soap, blend, and rinse.

Consider smoothies as another way to add variety to what and how you eat nutritious foods. Smoothies are simple because you add all the ingredients into one spot, blend, and enjoy. With a little practice, you will be able to build a better smoothie with a nutritious base, bulk, and boost!

References

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