

## Low Glycemic and Natural Sweeteners

*Natural sweeteners fall into two categories: wet and dry. For the most part, if you're looking to replace sugar in a recipe, dry is your best bet. However, some of the wet sweeteners work really well, too, and add a wonderful flavor. In those cases, you need to know how to convert and adapt your recipes. See below!*

### WET SWEETENERS I LOVE:

**Stevia.** Pure stevia extract (not cut with fillers like maltitol, cellulose or other powders) is my favorite wet sweetener. It's made from the stevia rebaudiana plant, and is a fully natural choice for zero glycemic (and zero calorie) sweetening. (Note: you can also buy stevia as a powdered extract, or powder made from leaves of the stevia plant. The latter is green and has a much stronger flavor than the liquid).

Substitutions: you can use stevia as a sub for sugar anywhere smaller quantities would be used, such as with tea, oatmeal, salad dressings, sauces, or even ice cream. When the sugar provides both bulk and a lot of sweetness (ie cakes or cookies) it's difficult to use stevia on its own. In those cases, I combine with another sweetener. (Stevia is good for all stages of the ACD).

As a general rule, use twice as much liquid stevia as pure (white) powder to achieve equal sweetness. For instance, 1/4 tsp (1 ml) liquid is roughly equivalent to 1/8 tsp (.5 ml) powder.

Cautions: some people report a metallic or bitter aftertaste. To avoid that, remember "less is more" with stevia. Use the bare minimum required to sweeten to the level that works (sometimes a little less sweet than you might be used to); if you want it sweeter, add ONE DROP AT A TIME to reach desired levels. I have never found these issues with NuNaturals stevia.

**Yacon Syrup.** Extracted from the roots of the yacon plant, yacon is a dark, sticky liquid, often compared to molasses. Its glycemic index ranges from "0" through 35 or higher (check that yours is not the higher level).

Substitutions: Because it has a flavor similar to molasses mixed with apple cider vinegar (with a bit of tanginess), use yacon sparingly. As with stevia, I always mix it with other sweeteners, and don't substitute it for sugar. You can use yacon as a molasses replacement in your cooking and baking. (Good for all stages of the ACD).

Cautions: none (except the expense!).

**Agave Nectar.** A lightly colored and lightly flavored liquid sweetener, agave is often used in place of honey in vegan cooking and baking. It is relatively low glycemic and has a very neutral flavor, great for baking or other uses. (Good for Stage 3 and beyond on the ACD).

Substitution Tips: Agave can be swapped 1:1 in place of other liquid sweeteners. If you use it in place of sugar, reduce your liquid ingredients in that recipe by 25%, and increase the dry as well by 25%. (So, if the original recipe has 1 cup sugar and 1 cup flour, use 3/4 cup agave and 1-1/4 cups flour).

Cautions: in recent years, studies have shown that agave may contain high amounts of fructose and be hard on the liver. I don't have a problem with organic, raw agave, but will use it sparingly and infrequently nonetheless, as there are better options now out there.

**Coconut Nectar.** A liquid sweetener sourced the same way as coconut sugar, coconut nectar is thick and sticky like honey or brown rice syrup. It has a low glycemic index and can be used in place of other higher-glycemic liquid sweeteners, such as maple syrup or honey.

I would recommend combining coconut nectar with other sweeteners in baking, as it's not terribly sweet and you would require an enormous amount to achieve the desired sweetness. I tend to use it when a butterscotch or caramel flavor is desired, but in conjunction with at least one other sweetener. (Good for stage 3 and beyond on the ACD).

Substitution Tips: Coconut nectar can replace most other thick liquid sweeteners 1:1. Because it's not overly sweet, you'd need a lot to replace sugar in a recipe; I prefer to combine it with other sweeteners.

**Fruit Purees.** If you eat fruit, fruit purees can be a great sugar substitute. The lower glycemic options are applesauce and pear purée. You can easily make your own pear puree with fresh pears; simply core and puree in a blender or food processor. (Good for stage 2 and beyond on the ACD).

Substitution Tips: as with other liquid sweeteners, the fruit purees will add moisture to the final product. If you're replacing sugar in a recipe, be sure to increase other dry ingredients, such as flour, when you use fruit purees.

Cautions: Remember that apples and pears are fruits. As such, be sure to count them as fruit servings during your day if you use them as sweeteners!

## **DRY SWEETENERS I LOVE:**

**Xylitol.** If sourced naturally, xylitol is a very useful zero glycemic sweetener. It's dry and white like sugar, with a granular texture. It does contain calories, however (about 40% of the calories of sugar). It has a very neutral flavor and no aftertaste. (Good for all stages of the ACD).

Substitution Tips: Use xylitol 1:1 instead of sugar. Great to substitute in recipes using white sugar.

Cautions: Some people report digestive issues if they use too much xylitol. Ease into it slowly and increase the amount you consume over time.

Some forms of xylitol are sourced from corn, so if you have corn allergies, you can't use it (plus, most corn is genetically modified). The Xyla brand is sourced from hardwood or birch, so it doesn't contain GMOs or corn.

Xylitol is also made of large granules that don't readily dissolve. To avoid having crunchy granules in your baked goods, either dissolve the xylitol in whatever liquid is in the recipe, or after measuring it, grind it to a powder in a coffee or spice grinder and then add to the recipe.

**Coconut Sugar.** A dry, granular sweetener with a flavor much like caramelized brown sugar, coconut sugar is made from the coconut palm flower. It is fairly low on the glycemic index at 35. (Good for stage 3 and beyond on the ACD).

Substitution Tips: While most sources say that coconut sugar can replace sugar 1:1, I find that it's not quite as sweet as sugar. I always add about 1-1/4 cups coconut sugar to replace any white sugar in a recipe.

Cautions: coconut sugar, like xylitol, does not dissolve easily. Always allow it to dissolve in the wet ingredients of a recipe before stirring, or else measure it first and then grind to a powder in a coffee or spice grinder before using.

**Lucuma Powder.** Lucuma powder is actually dried and pulverized flesh of the lucuma fruit. It has a slightly caramel flavor and is low on the glycemic index. (Good for stage 2 and beyond on the ACD).

Substitution Tips: I wouldn't use lucuma on its own as the sole sweetener in a recipe since it's not very sweet and is rather pricey. However, it's a lovely addition to ramp up the sweetness and confer a slight caramel or butterscotch flavor to your desserts.

Cautions: Lucuma is a fruit. As such, be sure to count it as a fruit serving during your day if you use it as a sweetener!