



# Everyday Eats

## Substitution: Strategy for Healthy Eating

by *Natasha Rosenstock Nadel*  
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Nothing in life is free, especially when it comes to food. Warm up store-bought or frozen lasagna to make your weeknights easy, and you will have enough saturated fat and sodium for days. Substitute artificial sweetener for sugar, and you'll have a dish that tastes artificial and still elicits the same insulin response as sugar.

Recipe from this story:

- Vegan, Gluten-Free Lasagna

I believe that substitution is the key strategy everyone should employ when trying to improve one's own diet or that of their family. However, that doesn't mean substituting with fake food. For instance, the strategic plan I outline in my book, *Healthy Family, Healthy You: The Healthy Mama's Guide to feeding your family well – simply and sanely!*, calls for examining your everyday meals and finding easy plant-based substitutions.

Your reasons for wanting to eat better could be seeking more energy or fewer calories. Either way, the goal should be to increase the nutrient content of your food. You can do this through adding nuts, seeds, legumes, lentils, fruits and vegetables. Your body ingests the nutrients and fiber and knows that you've eaten and are full. This does not happen when we eat junk food, which is specifically engineered in a laboratory to create an addictive quality and keep us coming back for more, forever searching for satiety.

There are a number of ways to substitute energy-draining foods with few nutrients for high-nutrient foods with energetic oomph! If you don't come up with replacements that touch on familiar tastes and presentation, it can be hard to change how your family eats. It is important to consider familiarity, taste and texture.

- Familiarity:** Sweet potatoes and lentils can replace white potatoes and meat in a Shepherd's pie. Fries can be made out of sweet potatoes, carrots, parsnips and even shiitake mushrooms. A pizza base doesn't need to be made from white flour or even whole wheat. You can use eggplant, zucchini, tofu or polenta. Silken tofu stands in for ricotta cheese, and firm tofu (with turmeric for a natural yellow color with anti-inflammatory properties) stands in for scrambled eggs.
- Taste:** Sometimes it seems as if only vegans know about nutritional yeast. Everyone should. Nutritional yeast adds a cheesy taste to foods, along with numerous B vitamins (including B12, usually only available from animal protein), eight grams of protein and four grams of fiber per two tablespoons. It's also low in fat and calories.
- Texture:** Soaked and pureed cashews are your best bet for creamy sauces. Pureed butternut squash also provides a creaminess and depth to many foods.

### Author Bio



**Natasha Rosenstock Nadel**  
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Natasha Nadel is a journalist and author focusing on the intersection of healthy food, family and community. She is the author of *Healthy Family, Healthy You: The Healthy Mama's Guide to feeding your family well – simply and sanely!* and *The Healthy Family Healthy You Cookbook*. You can find her free e-book, *Five Easy Weeknight Meals: Your 7 Day Family Makeover*, and healthy and creative ideas for your family on her [blog](#).

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February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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**February 3, 7:00 PM**  
Tu B'Shevat 2nd Annual Community Seder with Jewish Study Center

**February 7, 8:45 AM**  
Hunger Action