



Joan Chew puts the healthier mooncake offerings in town to a taste test

STARTS N PASTRIES (right)
The healthier choice: Four of the five baked mooncakes contain at least 30 per cent less sugar than their original versions.
They contain white lotus paste and either melon seeds, macadamia nuts, a single yolk or double yolks.
Glucose syrup has replaced white sugar as an ingredient. For every 100g of flour, the chef uses 14g of glucose syrup instead of 20g of white sugar, halving the calorie count of the sugar.
The taste: The white lotus paste is a tad harder than other samples, though the pastry is of the right thickness. It is less sweet than conventional mooncakes, but pleasantly so.
Where to buy: Outlets at Causeway Point, Jem, VivoCity and Tampines Mall; and mooncake fairs at VivoCity and Nex.
Prices: Between \$9.80 and \$11.50 per piece or between \$38 and \$51 for a box of four mooncakes, depending on the type of mooncake.
Call 9147-5907 or e-mail info@8tarts.com.sg



Ms Joanna Ong, managing director of 8Tarts n Pastries, now uses 14g of glucose syrup instead of 20g of white sugar for every 100g of flour.



Baker Delcie Lam of Delcie's Desserts and Cakes has mooncakes suitable for diabetics and vegans.

DELICIE'S DESSERTS AND CAKES (left)
The healthier choice: Its mooncakes are suitable for vegetarians, vegans and Muslims, as they do not contain egg, dairy, alcohol or animal by-products. Egg is not used to brush the surface of the mooncakes as well.
These traditional mooncakes are baked with raw sugar, which is minimally processed and has a higher molasses content than white sugar. Every 100g of the mooncake contains less than 24g of sugar. In contrast, some mooncakes have sugar that form up to 60 per cent of their weight.
The salted egg yolks have been substituted with either sugar-free pandan, salted mung bean or black sesame, all of which are lower in sodium content than egg yolk.
Two types of mooncakes have been created for people allergic to peanuts and those who cannot tolerate gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. The bunny and piglet mooncakes are made with rice flour, tapioca flour and potato starch.
The bunny mooncake contains red

bean paste and pumpkin seeds and is sweetened with agave nectar, while the piglet mooncake is made with white lotus paste and raw sugar.
The taste: My favourite was the sugar-free pandan with salted mung bean yolk as the pandan fragrance was aromatic and the mung bean had just a hint of saltiness.
The bunny mooncake is sure to delight red bean lovers as the filling is generous.
Where to buy: Delcie's Desserts and Cakes outlets at Upper Serangoon Road and Fortune Centre; Loving Heart outlets at International Plaza and Suntec City; and The Diabetic Shop outlets at Parkway Parade and Square 2.
Prices: \$98 for a box of four different mooncakes (baked red dragon fruit with sugar-free pandan yolk, baked sugar-free pandan with salted mung bean yolk, baked sugar-free white lotus with black sesame yolk and baked gluten-free mooncakes).
Call 9789-2309 or 6282-2951 or e-mail order@DelciesDesserts.com

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PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN, DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



JOAN CHEW

Fly me to the moon – lightly

Mind Your Body finds out how bakers and chefs tweak their mooncake recipes to create healthier snacks with less sugar and fat

The fist-sized mooncake is a calorie-dense treat that dieters frown upon, so it is a good thing that it is eaten only once a year in celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival.
The festival is marked on the 15th day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar and will fall on next Thursday this year.
Consider this: A plain, traditional baked mooncake with lotus paste contains 716 kilocalories (kcal). This rises to 788kcal if one salted egg yolk is included and 975kcal for four.
That would make up almost half the daily calorie intake for an average adult man (2,000 to 2,200kcal) and woman (1,800 to 2,000kcal).
Dietitian Derrick Ong of Eat Right Nutrition Consultancy said mooncakes usually contain high amounts of sugar and fat, especially saturated fat – “bad” news for those who are watching their weight or have high cholesterol.
Eating 500kcal extra a day for a week will cause one to put on between 0.5kg and 1kg.
Ms Denise Tan, a nutritionist at the Centre of Excellence (Nutrition) at the Health Promotion Board (HPB), warned that a plain mooncake contains 14 teaspoonfuls of sugar and six teaspoonfuls of fat.
An average person's daily limit is

10 teaspoonfuls of sugar and 13 teaspoonfuls of fat.
But with more people becoming health-conscious these days, this sinful treat is getting plenty of makeovers, usually with much less sugar as well as vegetable oil instead of the traditional lard.
BAKE YOUR OWN VERSION
Mind Your Body found at least a dozen places selling mooncakes with sugar content that has been cut by 15 to 70 per cent from their original recipes.
One mooncake, from Carlton Hotel, even earned the Health Promotion Board's (HPB) stamp of approval in July as a healthier choice.
Ms Tan said: “Mooncakes that are at least 25 per cent lower in sugar and saturated fat than the original products will be given the Healthier Choice Symbol.”
Manufacturers can apply for this label after they have had the nutritional contents of their products analysed by approved laboratories.
At least two bakers here are also reporting brisk business for their healthy mooncake baking classes this year.
Ms Judy Koh, managing director and principal chef of Caffé Palet by Creative Culinaire and 14-year-old cooking school

Creative Culinaire The School, has taught four classes with a total of 100 students how to make sugar-free white lotus paste.
Another baking instructor, Ms Shinni Tick, 40, has run five classes with 38 students in all.
She taught them how to make snowskin mooncakes and Shanghai mooncakes that use between 6 and 60 per cent less sugar than other recipes.
A LIMIT TO HOW LOW YOU CAN GO
The biggest challenge to rolling out healthier mooncakes is to “retain the authenticity of the taste without compromising on the texture”, said Mr Patrick Ng, restaurant manager of Man Fu Yuan at InterContinental Singapore.
The other challenge is to debunk the perception that low-sugar mooncakes are not as tasty as their sweeter counterparts, he added.
In July, Man Fu Yuan introduced a range of low-sugar mooncakes “for consumers who love indulging in mooncakes yet prefer their mooncakes to be less sweet”, he said.
Each white lotus seed paste mooncake holds either a single yolk or macadamia nuts. They are now the

restaurant's third best-selling range, after the classic white lotus range and snowskin mooncakes, Mr Ng said.
At Majestic Restaurant, demand for its low-sugar mooncakes tripled between 2007, when it launched such mooncakes, and last year.
To make 2kg of white lotus paste, its chef, Mr Yong Bing Ngen, 47, now uses 850g of sugar, down from 1kg previously.
But there is a limit to how much sugar can be cut, he said.
“Mooncake is, after all, a sweet pastry. Using too little sugar will affect the taste, colour and presentation of the white lotus paste,” he explained.
Other chefs and bakers forgo fine white sugar in favour of sugar substitutes that provide sweetness but are lower in calories and more suitable for diabetics.
For example, the HPB-approved, low-sugar white lotus paste mooncake by Carlton Hotel is sweetened with maltitol. This sugar alcohol gives the same intensity of sweetness as sugar without the excessive calories.
A quarter of this mooncake gives 80kcal, less than half the 179kcal of a conventional white lotus paste mooncake.
AVOID THAT YOLK
At 8Tarts n Pastries, for every 100g of

flour, 14g of glucose syrup is used, instead of 20g of white sugar two years ago, said its managing director, Ms Joanna Ong.
Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants at Camden Medical Centre, calculated that doing so cuts the caloric contribution of this ingredient from 80kcal to 45kcal and the sugar content from 20g to 5.6g.
Still, she cautioned people to watch how much they eat. She said: “While it may be lower in calories, it is still not calorie-free.”
Bakers and chefs are also doing without lard, one of the basic ingredients for mooncakes, in favour of healthier oil such as olive oil and peanut oil.
Ms Reutens said lard is saturated fat, which raises the consumer's level of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol or “bad” cholesterol and, in turn, the risk of heart disease and stroke.
She said: “Having a snack with high saturated fat and high sugar is bad for diabetics, heart patients and those with a history of stroke.”
That is not all. People with high blood pressure should also refrain from eating mooncakes that contain salted egg yolks. Consumption of high levels of sodium, found in salt, has been linked to high

blood pressure which, in turn, raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.
Luckily, egg yolk is one ingredient that can be left out of mooncakes.
WORTH THE EXTRA COST
Healthier mooncakes are here to stay because people want them.
Among them is administrator Pamela Heah, whose 63-year-old diabetic mother can polish off a whole mooncake in one sitting, despite admonishments not to.
Ms Heah, 44, has bought low-sugar mooncakes from Park Hotel Group for her family for the second year running. She finds these “neither too sweet nor oily”.
She said: “My mother can be quite uncontrollable when it comes to eating mooncakes, so I'm more comfortable giving her something with less sugar in it.”
Marketing manager Kenry Peh, 44, has also ordered 20 boxes of low-sugar white lotus seed paste with single-yolk mooncakes from Man Fu Yuan for his family, friends and staff.
He feels that healthier gifts reflect the well-wishes of the giver.
He said: “These low-sugar mooncakes cost a few dollars more than their original versions, but I'm not bothered by it.”
joanchew@sph.com.sg

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Three tips from the experts

- 1 VARY YOUR MOONCAKES**
Mooncakes with salted egg yolks are higher in fat and cholesterol than those without.
A quarter slice of mooncake with double yolks contains an average of 120mg of cholesterol, which makes up about 40 per cent of a person's daily cholesterol limit.
So, when buying a box of mooncakes, mix and match those with and without yolks. This way, you get variety and also less fat and cholesterol.
Snowskin mooncakes look light, but are not necessarily healthier than baked ones.
Depending on how much icing sugar is used to make the skin, they may contain more sugar.
Avoid those made with vegetable shortening.
While it lengthens the shelf life and improves the texture, it contains trans fat.
This form of fat raises the level of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol or “bad” cholesterol in the blood and lowers the level of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, or “good” cholesterol.
“Bad” cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease, while “good” cholesterol decreases it.
Snowskin mooncakes that contain fruit have slightly more fibre than those without. But they are still made of oil, sugar and flour, bringing their calorie count to a similar level.
Flaky mooncakes, such as the Shanghai mooncakes, require two types of dough – plain dough and oily dough – in alternate layers.
This means that flaky mooncakes contain more fat than the baked or snowskin varieties.
So choose the baked
- 2 LIMIT YOUR INTAKE**
Have a quarter of a mooncake every other day. Do not eat it every day, which will encourage the habit of snacking.
Relish your treat by eating it slowly.
In a week, do not have more than one regular-sized mooncake in total.
- 3 MAKE YOUR OWN MOONCAKES**
The basic ingredients for mooncakes are lard, oil, flour and sugar.
Replace lard with peanut or canola oil to reduce the amount of saturated fat, which is converted into “bad” cholesterol after being eaten.
Use less sugar or a low-calorie sweetener such as sorbitol.
Make healthier filling from mashed sweet potatoes mixed with dried fruits, and baked and unsalted nuts and seeds.
Nuts and seeds are high in fibre, vitamins, minerals and unsaturated fat, which becomes “good” cholesterol.
Source: Ms Denise Tan, nutritionist at the Centre of Excellence (Nutrition) at the Health Promotion Board; Ms Jaclyn Reutens, clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants; and Mr Derrick Ong, dietitian at Eat Right Nutrition Consultancy