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10 Grain Substitutes

By: Dr. Axe Food Is Medicine

Looking to cut back on grains but unsure how to handle cravings for your favorite foods like bread, muffins and pasta? Luckily, there are tons of creative ways to use root vegetables, beans, nuts and coconuts to replicate some of your guiltiest pleasures – all without using any grains at all. Here are 10 easy and tasty recipes to make grain, rice, bread and sandwich substitutes to try now:

1. Collard “Wraps”

Skip traditional wraps made using gluten-containing wheat flour and opt for low-calorie, nutrient-packed collard greens instead. Not only will you avoid digestive issues and a sugar spike from the processed gluten, added sugar and preservatives found in most store-bought wraps, but this smart sandwich substitute will give you a good dose of vitamins A, C, K and calcium, too.

2. Cauliflower “Rice”

If you feel like a stir-fry, fajitas or sushi are not complete without a side of rice, you’re going to love the idea of using finely diced cauliflower instead. When chopped into very small rice-like “grains,” uncooked cauliflower works perfectly in both savory and sweet recipes. Use it in rice pilafs, to make homemade sushi or even in desserts like this Faux Rice Pudding. You can make your own by throwing raw cauliflower into a food processor or blender, then microwaving or sautéing it for just several minutes, or until it’s tender not but soggy. Even Trader Joe’s has caught on to the hype over cauliflower rice and recently started selling pre-diced cauliflower in the frozen section!

3. Taro or Plantain Chips

You can find plantain chips in most large grocery stores, but unfortunately they’re usually deep-fried in refined vegetable oil and covered with preservatives and sodium. Considering how simple it is to make your own, give it a try using ripe plantains, beets or taro (a relative of the potato native to tropical islands like Hawaii) if you can get your hands on some. Plantain, beet and taro chips can be made the same way as Baked Sweet Potato Fries or chips — slicing them, tossing in some coconut/olive oil and baking them at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes before seasoning.

4. Coconut “Pizza Crust”

Coconut flour is your new best friend when it comes to replacing grain flours. Packed with fiber, it absorbs a high level of liquid, so you’ll need to use extra water and potentially eggs, too, in recipes. Use coconut flour in place of wheat flour in all kinds of recipes — from breads to muffins to cookies. To make homemade grain-free pizza, you can follow this recipe for Coconut Crust Pizza.

5. Zucchini “Noodles”

Are you yet to try the ever-popular spiralizers now widely available in home and cooking stores? This one is as simple it sounds — by shredding raw zucchini into thin noodle-like strands, you’ve got the perfect substitute for pasta. Use “zoodles” in place of wheat or rice noodles, in pasta

salads, pesto dishes, or simply with some tomato sauce and high-quality (ideally organic and raw) cheese. Give it a try with this super-simple recipe for Zucchini Noodles with Marinara Sauce.

6. Chickpea Socca “Bread”

Socca has been a traditional recipe made throughout the Middle East for centuries. Instead of using flour, gluten-free socca is made with a combination of chickpea flour, extra virgin olive oil and spices. Best when baked in the oven in a cast-iron pan, it comes out dense and hearty enough to use in place of pitas with dip, as the base for a homemade pizza, or as a higher-protein alternative to crepes and pancakes.

7. Jicama “Taco Shells”

Unfamiliar with jicama? Many people describe its taste as a cross between a potato and an apple. Since it has a much higher water content than potatoes and much less sugar than apples, it’s a perfect low-carb substitute for corn or flour tortillas. To make jicama taco “shells,” cut the skin off of a large raw jicama, slice it in half width-wise using a mandolin slicer, then bake the jicama rounds in the oven for just 5–10 minutes to soften them up and make them more pliable.

8. “Paleo Bread” or Grain-Free Muffins

Just because you’re looking to cut down on grains doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy a nice slice of bread, muffin or sandwich. Using almond flour (or almond meal) along with eggs, coconut oil and coconut flour is the perfect base for making your favorite baked goods without all the gluten and grains. The options are endless when it comes to flavor varieties, whether you choose to go savory or sweet. Try these Gluten-Free Blueberry Muffins or this Cheesy Bread Recipe.

9. Potato “Buns”

Popular among paleo eaters, potato buns are the perfect way to enjoy a burger, tuna melt or egg sandwich all while staying grain-free. For a simple sandwich substitute, slice a wide potato into rounds that are about ½ inch thick, then bake them in the oven at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes to replicate carb-dense rolls or bread.

10. Rice-less Sushi

Nori rolls are the perfect vehicle for fish, veggies and avocado dressed in some tasty Asian-inspired sauce. While a standard sushi roll comes packed with up to one cup of white rice, skipping the rice and wrapping the ingredients in a nori roll works just as well. Nori is an edible red seaweed that’s popular in East Asia and is packed with protein, fiber and trace minerals — and is, in fact, an iodine-rich food that can also prevent an iron deficiency. Some simple ideas for making rice-free sushi? Roll out a nori roll, top with tuna, avocado, scrambled eggs, veggies, sweet potato or bean sprouts, then roll up and dip into tamari or coconut aminos.

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