



Grains of truth about CRACKERS

Definitions

Crackers are thin, crisp wafers or biscuits, usually made of unsweetened and unleavened dough.

History

Early crackers were a matter of convenience for people on the run, namely the Jews fleeing Egyptian slavery. Too rushed to allow their dough to rise, matzoh was the result.

The early crackers, or “biscuits” as the English call them, were handmade, hard-baked products made from flour and a little moisture. The low level of moisture, decreased even further with baking, left no medium for molds to grow. Made with little fat, rancidity was not a concern.

A soda cracker barrel was the method of marketing as long as cracker production was localized. At the turn of the century, Adolphus Green laid the foundation for the modern cracker baking system that is used today. He was the first to abandon the old barrel and supply fresh, whole crackers in triple-wrapped packages.

Crackers remain a convenient, versatile food. Manufacturers are moving to meet consumer demand by providing an increased variety of low-fat and convenient options. Consumer desire for healthy snacks is resulting in an increasing variety of products that are low-fat, low-salt and low- or no-cholesterol.

Availability

Crackers can be found in any grocery store or can be made at home. Americans eat saltine crackers the most—about two pounds per person annually. However, saltine consumption is decreasing while snack crackers are slowly increasing. Total annual cracker consumption in the United States is about eight pounds per person.

Crackers are served as a snack, appetizer or light meal accompaniment. They are eaten before,

during, after and between meals, and are a quick addition to dinner parties, picnics, lunch bags and snacks. Crackers can be good substitutes for sweeter snacks.

Storage

If stored in an airtight container in a cool place, crackers will remain fresh and crisp for several weeks. If they become soggy, restore crispness by baking in a 300°F oven 4 to 5 minutes.

Nutritional value

A serving is generally ½ ounce, which is four to eight crackers, depending on the type.

Soft white flour, unbleached and usually enriched with niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, folic acid, iron and possibly calcium, is the main ingredient. Whole-grains or whole-grain flours may be used.

Crackers may be higher in fat than other wheat foods such as bread, pasta, tortillas and cereal, so read the labels on commercially prepared crackers to determine the amount and type of fat.



Recipe

Wheat Crackers

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup whole-wheat flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, softened
- ½-⅔ cup milk, 1%
- Salt or sesame seeds (optional)

Preheat oven to 325°

In a large bowl or food processor, combine the flours, sugar and salt. Cut in butter until the mixture resembles coarse meal.

Blend in the milk slowly, adding just enough to form a dough that will hold together in a solid ball. Divide the dough into 2 equal halves. On a floured surface or pastry cloth, roll the dough thin, 1/16 to 1/8 inch. If desired, lightly sprinkle the tops with salt or sesame seeds and gently roll over the dough with rolling pin. With a sharp knife, cut the crackers into 2-inch squares or use your favorite cookie cutter. Transfer to an un-greased baking sheet. Prick each cracker in 2 or 3 places with the tines of a fork.

Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until the crackers are lightly browned. Cool on a rack. Yields 95 to 100 crackers; 8 crackers is one serving.

Nutrient Analysis: One serving (8 crackers) provides approximately: 129 calories, 3 g protein, 23 g carbohydrates, 1 g dietary fiber, 3 g fat (1 g saturated), 1 mg cholesterol, 25 mcg folate, 1 mg iron, 22 g calcium, 53 mg potassium and 66 mg sodium.



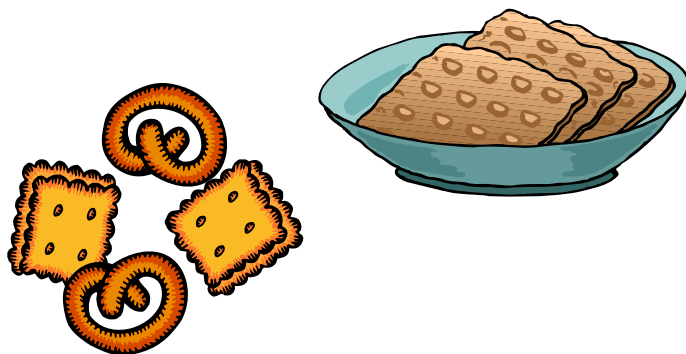
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Roasted Red-Pepper Spread

- 8 ounces nonfat sour cream
- 1 7-ounce jar of roasted red peppers
- 4 ounces nonfat cream cheese
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil leaves
- ½ tablespoon dried oregano leaves
- 1 garlic clove, minced

In food processor or electric blender, add all ingredients; blend just until red-peppers are finely chopped. Pour into bowl and chill at least one hour. Serve with fat-free or reduced fat crackers. Makes approximately 18 tablespoon servings (1-ounce).

Nutrient Analysis: One serving provides approximately: 25 calories, 2 g protein, 4 g carbohydrates, 0 g dietary fiber, 0 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 3 mcg folate, 0 mg iron, 42 mg calcium, 77 mg potassium and 41 mg sodium.



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